

THE ARGOSY.

DECEMBER 1, 1868.

ANNE HERFORD.

BY THE AUTHOR OF "EAST LYNNE."

CHAPTER XXV.

AN IGNOMINIOUS EXIT.

THE windows were thrown open to the bright morning air; the late autumn birds were singing, the trees were gently waving; even the gloomy pine-walk opposite had a ray of sunlight on it. Little thought I, as I stood in the oak-parlour with my great happiness, little thought the servants as they went about their work, that some one lay dead in the west wing.

Breakfast waited on the table; the postman came with the letters; Hickens looked in to see if he might bring the urn. He waited on us far more than the rest did, although he was butler, knowing that Mr. Chandos liked it.

A stir in the hall at last: Mrs. Penn's voice speaking to Lizzy Dene. The tones were low, but they reached my ear.

"I cannot think you delivered that letter last evening, Lizzy. I ought to have received an answer long before this."

"Not deliver it, ma'am!" returned Lizzy, with every sound of surprise. "I gave it in to the young man at the door."

"Wait a moment, Lizzy: what a hurry you are in! Are you sure Mr. Edwin Barley was at home?"

"Of course I am not sure," returned Lizzy: and I pictured Mrs. Penn to myself at that moment: her cheeks flushing red, her eyes flashing fire.

"You deceitful woman! You told me last night Mr. Edwin Barley was at home!"

"Ma'am, I told you the young man said he was at home. I can't stay here a minute longer: if Hill finds me gossiping here, she'll be fit to pull my ears for me."

A slight rustling in the portico. I looked from the window, and saw Mrs. Penn go flying away as speedily as middle-aged, portly women can fly. Mr. Chandos came into the room at the same time.

"How is your brother, Mr. Chandos?"

"Better, I trust, than he has been for many years in this life. It is over, Anne. He died at twelve last night.

The words struck on me as a great shock. Over! Dead!

"He was sensible to the last moment. It was a happy death," continued Mr. Chandos, in a low, solemn tone. "Truly may it be said that he has 'come out of great tribulation.' God receive and bless him!"

I sat down. Mr. Chandos turned over the letters in an abstracted kind of manner, but did not really look at them. When I thought I might venture to speak, I mentioned Mrs. Penn's reproach to Lizzy Dene, and her running off afterwards (there was no doubt) to Mr. Edwin Barley.

"Ay, I saw her go," he replied. "The answer she has been waiting for were the police, on their mission to arrest my brother George. They may come now. And presently will do so," he added, "for I have sent for them."

"For the police again! What for?"

He made no answer. Emily came in, looking as he did, rather subdued. She spoke civilly to me: with death in a house people keep down their temper. Mr. Chandos rang the bell for breakfast, and then we all stood at the window.

"Where's Dr. Laken?" asked Emily.

"Gone out," replied Mr. Chandos. "He breakfasted early."

"Do the servants know of George's death?" she resumed, lowering her voice. "Will they be told of it?"

"Certainly not. We hope to keep it private to the end."

"But there must be——"

"Yes, yes," he hastily interrupted, perceiving she would have alluded to the funeral. "Laken manages all that."

Hickens came in with the urn. Seeing the letters lying there untouched, he spoke with the familiarity of a privileged servant.

"The Indian mail is in, sir."

Mr. Chandos turned quickly to the table. "I see it is, Hickens." But I don't think he had seen it until then.

"I suppose there's no letter for me from Alfred," said Madame de Mellissie, languidly looking round. "I'm not anxious to read it, if there is: it would only be full of groans and scolding. Or from Tom either? He never writes to me."

Mr. Chandos shook his head. "There's only one from Tom, and that is to me."

"But I see another Indian letter," she said, slowly approaching the table. "It has a black seal."

"Not from Thomas: it is in a strange handwriting. It is addressed to my mother."

"Any letters for my lady, sir?" asked Hill, entering the parlour.

"Two. One of them from India, tell her; but not from Sir Thomas."

Hill retreated with the letters. Emily placed herself in my seat at the head of the table, and we began breakfast. It was a poor meal for all of us that morning. Mr. Chandos drank his coffee at a draught, and opened his brother's letter.

"They were on the eve of action, Emily," he presently said. "Just going into it when Thomas wrote this. Some local engagement."

"Is it well over?"

"I hope so. But he closed this letter at once. Here is what he says in conclusion: 'I shall drop this into the post now, and if I come out of the turmoil safely, give you a second note to say so. That is if the post should not have gone: if it has, you must wait another fortnight.' Where's the evening paper?" added Mr. Chandos, seeking out a newspaper which had come with the letters, and tearing it open. "News of this action, however unimportant it was, ought to have come by telegraph."

He had scarcely said this when Hill came in, speaking and looking like one in alarm. I thought of the police: I fancy Mr. Chandos did.

"Sir—Mr. Harry—my lady wishes you to come to her instantly."

He appeared aroused by the tone—or the looks—and went out at once, opening the sheets of the newspaper as he did so. Madame de Mellissie demanded of Hill what he was wanted for.

"I hardly know what, ma'am. Something very sad, I fear, has happened."

Emily started to her feet. "Hill! that letter never contained bad news from India?—from Sir Thomas?"

"It has got bad news of some sort in it for certain," was Hill's rejoinder. "My lady gave a great scream before she had read three lines, and said some confused words about her darling son Thomas. The fear upon me, ma'am, is, that he has been hurt in battle."

Worse than that! worse than that! It came upon me with a prevision as I thought of the black seal and the strange handwriting. Emily, impulsive in all she did, went running up to the west wing. While I waited alone for them to return with some news, good or bad, I heard Mrs. Penn come in and accost Lizzy Dene, who was rubbing the brasses in the hall.

"Where is the letter I gave you last night?" she curtly demanded, her tone very sharp.

"Why, ma'am, what's the use of asking me?" returned the undaunted Lizzy, after a faint pause. "Mr. Edwin Barley's people must know more about that."

"The letter you delivered was not my letter."

"Not your letter!" repeated Lizzy Dene, evidently affecting the most genuine surprise. "I don't know what you mean, ma'am."

"The letter you left at Mr. Edwin Barley's, instead of being the one I handed to you, was some rubbishing circular of the fashions. How dared you do such a thing?"

"My goodness me!" exclaimed Lizzy. "To think of that! But, Mrs. Penn, it's not possible."

"Don't talk to me about it's not being possible! You have been wilfully careless. I must have my letter produced."

"I declare to goodness I don't know where it is, or what has become of it, if, as you say, ma'am, it was not the one I gave in to the young man," spoke Lizzy, this time with real earnestness. "I had a letter of fashions in my basket; but it's odd I could make such a mistake."

"You did make it," Mrs. Penn angrily rejoined. "Where is the letter now?"

"Ma'am, I can't imagine. It must have been spirited away."

"Don't talk nonsense to me about 'spirited.' If you gave in the one for the other, you must still have had my letter left in your basket. What did you do with it?"

"If you offered me a thousand pounds to tell, I couldn't," was Lizzy's answer. "Looking upon it as nothing but a letter of the fashions, I thought it was of no moment, else I remember opening my basket after leaving Mr. Barley's, and seeing there was nothing in it. I wondered then what could have gone with the fashions. I'm sure, ma'am, I am very sorry."

Mrs. Penn went upstairs. It was apparently a profitless inquiry. Lizzy Dene rubbed away again at her brass, and I waited and waited. The servants began to stand about in groups, coming perpetually into the hall; the rumour that something was wrong in India had spread. By-and-by the truth was brought down by Hill, with great tears upon her face. Sir Thomas Chandos was dead.

It was not a false report, as had once come, of his death. Ah, no! He had fallen in battle, gallantly leading his men to the charge. The Commander-in-Chief in India had written to Lady Chandos with his own hand: he said how much her son was regretted—that all the officers who could be spared attended the funeral. A shot had struck him in the breast. He had but time to say a few words, and died, his mother's name being the last upon his lips.

Hickens entered the oak-parlour and drew down the white blinds. While talking of Sir Thomas, he burst into tears. It all proved to me how much Thomas Chandos had been liked by those about him.

The breakfast things were taken away; an hour passed; and the morning was growing weary, when Mr. Chandos came down, traces of

emotion on his face. Alas! he was no longer "Mr." but Sir Harry Chandos.

The first person I heard give him his title was Dr. Laken. How strange it was!—had the news arrived only on the previous morning, the title must have remained in abeyance. Poor, banned, dying George had been the heir to it by right of birth; but I suppose the law would not have given it to him. Dr. Laken called Mr. Chandos "Sir Harry" three or four times in the presence of the servants very pointedly. I thought he wanted to impress tacitly upon them the fact that there was no intervening heir. It was very strange; all those blinds that they had not dared to draw down for George, the grief they had not liked to show, the mourning they might have been doubtful whether to assume; all did duty for both brothers now, and might be open and legitimate.

"I think the shadow of death had fallen upon Thomas when he wrote," said Mr. Chandos, in a low tone. And Dr. Laken echoed the words questioningly.

"The shadow of death?"

"I mean the prevision of it. Throughout his letter to me a vein of sadness runs; and he concludes it, 'Farewell, Harry; God bless you!' He never so wrote before. You shall read the letter, Laken: my mother has it now."

Lady Chandos had been coming down that day, they said; but the news had stopped it, and she would not now be seen until the morrow. The morning went on. Two official-looking people came, gentlemen, and were taken by Dr. Laken to the west wing. I gathered that it had something to do with identification, in case there should be any doubt afterwards of the death: both of them had known George Heneage in the days gone by.

The blinds were down throughout the house. Madame de Mellissie evidently found it dull. She seemed very cross; and I overheard a few words of dispute with her brother, as they passed the door of the oak-parlour.

"Do you forget that your position is changed? When you gave me that hint last evening, you were, comparatively speaking, an obscure individual; now you are Sir Harry Chandos, a powerful and very wealthy baronet."

Once more the police came to the house. Mr. Chandos was waiting for them. He marshalled them upstairs to the east wing, at the door of which Mrs. Penn happened to be standing. They all went in and the door was shut. What took place I learnt later.

In the most courteous manner possible, consistent with the circumstances, Mr. Chandos explained to Mrs. Penn that the police had come for *her*. He had reason to believe *she* was the person who had been disturbing the tranquillity of Chandos, he said. When she had

offered her boxes for search before, he had declined to permit them to be touched: he must, much as he regretted the necessity, order them to be searched now. Mrs. Penn was taken to. What she said never transpired outside: resistance would have been simply foolish; and she made up for it by insolence. The police quietly did their duty, and found ample proof: a few skeleton keys, that would open any lock in the house, the chief. Her own lace was there; Mr. Chandos's memorandum-book. She had come into the house a spy, feverishly hoping to find out the abiding-place of George Heneage.

Her bitter animosity against him had but grown with years. An accidental circumstance had brought to her a suspicion that George Heneage's hiding-place was in England: and she had laid her plans and entered Chandos in the full intention of discovering it. My presence there had somewhat baffled her: she could not go peeping about in my sight; she took Mr. Chandos's private book from his desk, in the hope that it might help her to the discovery she had at heart, and then invented the story of losing her lace to divert the scent from herself. Later, she conceived another scheme—that of getting me out of the house; she stole the money to put it into my box; arranged the supposed opening of her reticule in my room, and the reading of her sealed letter; and abstracted the letter I had put on the hall-table, hoping Mr. Chandos would fall into the trap and send me from Chandos. *Now* could be understood her former anxiety that the police should search her boxes and mine; hers were ready for the inspection, mine had the money in them; and, at that time (as I knew later), also the memorandum-book. It was she who had written the anonymous letters. Something else was found in her boxes besides skeleton keys—a grey cloak. Putting one thing with another, Mr. Chandos thought he had little need of further speculation as to who had stopped his horse in the avenue that night, and caused his fall from it. And the reason may as well be mentioned here, though it is anticipating our knowledge of it. She had lingered about the private groves of Chandos until dusk that afternoon, hoping to see Mr. Edwin Barley, whose house she was forbidden; in going forth at length, openly, having put her cloak on because she was cold—and how it was Hill had not seen it on her arm when talking with her in the portico, was a mystery, for she had brought it to Chandos, left it in the hall there, and taken it up on her departure—in going down the avenue she met Mr. Chandos riding up it. She had never before seen him, and she took him in the dusk for his brother. She actually thought she was encountering George Heneage; and the noise with which she approached the horse and flung up her arms, was not made to frighten the animal, but simply to express execration, in her great surprise. At the same moment, even as it escaped her, she discovered her mistake, and that it was not George Heneage.

“Now, madam,” said Mr. Chandos, the search over, the proofs in

the officers' hands, "what have you to urge why I should not give you into custody? You have been living in my mother's house under false colours; you have been rifling locks; you have taken my money; you have written anonymous letters; you have been carrying tales to Mr. Edwin Barley."

"All that I have done I was justified in doing," she answered, braving it out. "I was at work in your house, Harry Chandos, as a detective: my acts bore but one aim—the discovery of your brother, the murderer. And I have succeeded. In an hour's time from this, perhaps, the tables will be turned. As to your money, Mr. Chandos, it is wrapped in paper and directed to you. I don't steal money."

"What palliation have you to offer for your conduct?—what excuse against my giving you into custody?" repeated Mr. Chandos.

"If you choose to do it, *do* it," she returned. "Some one of far greater import than I will be shortly taken into custody from this house. I am of the kin of the Barleys: you and they are implacable enemies: all stratagems are fair when the discovery of criminals, hiding from the law, is in question. I have only done my duty; I would do it again. Give me into custody if you like, Mr. Chandos. The tables will soon be turned."

"No, they will not be turned, in the sense you would insinuate, and for that reason I can afford to be generous," answered Mr. Chandos. "Had real harm come of this matter, I would have prosecuted you to the utmost rigour of the law. But, as it is beyond your power now, or Mr. Edwin Barley's either, to do us harm, you may go from us scot-free. But I cannot allow you to remain longer at Chandos. Forgive me the seeming inhospitality, if I say I would rather you did not wait to partake of another meal in the house. Your things shall be sent after you. Or, if you prefer to gather them together, these officers will wait while you do it, and then escort you from my house into that of Mr. Edwin Barley."

"I will not be escorted abroad by police-officers," she passionately answered.

"You possess no choice, madam. I have, so far, given you into their charge: and they will take care to undertake it."

A very short while seemed to suffice to put her things up, and Mrs. Penn came forth, attended by the two officers. In some mood of reckless defiance, or perhaps to conceal herself as much as possible from the gaze of the world, she had put on the grey cloak, and drawn the hood over her head.

Mr. Chandos recognized her at once, as she had looked that night. He could but be a gentleman, and had gone out to the hall in courtesy when she came down to depart. The sight of her, thus, startled him for a moment.

"Ah, I should have known you anywhere, Mrs. Penn. What had I or my horse done to you that you should attack us?"

She turned and faced him. It really seemed as though she believed herself in the right in all the past acts, and felt proud to have done so well. All this while, it must be remembered, she supposed George Heneage was alive in the west wing, and would soon be taken from it to a criminal prison. She could afford to make concessions now.

"It was not you or your horse I attacked intentionally. I mistook you for another. For that brother of yours, Mr. Chandos, whose liberty will soon be put beyond jeopardy, and his life after it. Your great likeness to George Heneage, as he looked in those old days at Hallam, is unfortunate. For one thing, it has caused me to hate you; when, to speak candidly, I think in yourself there is not much to hate. You"—turning her flashing eyes on the men—"are seeing me out of the house because I have acted my part effectually in it; a part that Sir Richard Mayne himself would say I was justified in; but there is a greater criminal concealed above, for whom a warrant is, as I expect, already in force."

"You are wrong," said Mr. Chandos. "Were the whole establishment of Scotland Yard to make their appearance here, each with a warrant in his hand, they would scarcely execute it. It has been a long, a weary, and a wearing battle: Edwin Barley against George Heneage: but God has shown himself on the side of mercy."

The words puzzled her a little. "Has he escaped?" she fiercely asked. "Has he left the house?"

"He has not left it, Mrs. Penn; he is in the west wing."

She threw up her head with a glow of triumph, and walked rapidly away down the broad walk, the policemen escorting her.

And so, after all, Mrs. Penn had been the guilty one; and poor Lizzy Dene was innocent and faithful. Lizzy had been in a little trouble on her own score, connected with some ill-doing relatives, and it had rendered her manner strange.

Many minutes could not have elapsed when Hickens was called upon to open the hall-door to a visitor. My heart seemed to shrink to nothing at the voice, for it was Mr. Edwin Barley's. What brought him to Chandos, boldly inquiring for its inmates?

It appeared that Mrs. Penn, on her stealthy visit to his house that morning, had not seen him. Upon inquiring for Mr. Barley, she was told he had gone out betimes, shooting. The information took her aback. Gone out shooting when his enemy, for whom he had been searching night and day these ten years, was found to be close at hand, waiting to be apprehended! And she forthwith accused the footman of not delivering to his master the note left at the house the previous night; upon which she had the pleasure of hearing that the note was duly delivered to Mr. Edwin Barley, and turned out to be a circular of

the fashions. All she could do then was to write a few lines, giving him the information about George Heneage, with a charge that it should be put into Mr. Barley's hands the instant he set foot in the house. But Mr. Barley did not return to it quickly. The birds were shy that day.

Later, when he was at length going home, his gun in one hand and a brace of pheasants in the other, he encountered a procession. Turning out at the lodge-gates came Mrs. Penn, one policeman walking by her side, another behind; and, following on, Mrs. Penn's luggage in a truck, propelled by a man in the Chandos livery. Mr. Edwin Barley naturally stopped, although he had not been on cordial terms with Mrs. Penn for some years, and inquired the meaning of what he saw.

"You are the only relative I have, left in the world, Mr. Edwin Barley; will you, as such, suffer this indignity to be put upon me?" were the first words she spoke. And he, thus called upon, turned in his haughty, menacing manner on the officers. She *was* his relative, as she said, and he possessed some right feeling.

"What is the meaning of this? Unhand the lady! Why are you guarding her in that offensive manner?"

"We have orders, sir, to see the lady safely away from Chandos."

"Who gave you the orders?"

"Mr. Chandos."

Mr. Edwin Barley said something about making Mr. Chandos retract his orders before the day was over; but the men were not to be intimidated.

"The lady has not been behaving on the square, sir, and we thought at first she would be given into custody. But Mr. Chandos considered it over; and said, as she had been able to effect no great harm, he'd let her go."

Mr. Edwin Barley looked to Mrs. Penn for an explanation. Instead of giving it, she whispered in his ear the information about George Heneage. For the first time for years, Mr. Edwin Barley's face twitched with powerful emotion.

"WHAT do you say?" he asked in his surprise and bewilderment.

"What I say is plain: George Heneage, the murderer of your ward, the indirect murderer of your wife, is in concealment at Chandos," said Mrs. Penn, rather tragically. "The mysteries of that west wing have been cleared to me. Anne Hereford penetrated to it yesterday for some purpose of her own, and saw him: an emaciated being, she described him, bearing a striking resemblance to Harry Chandos. Now what do you say to my having entered the house as a detective, Mr. Edwin Barley? And it is for having pursued my investigations that Mr. Chandos has turned me forth in this ignominious manner."

Mr. Edwin Barley drew in his lips. She said not a word, be it understood, of the illegitimate mode in which she had pursued the said

investigations. He turned matters rapidly over in his mind, and then addressed the policeman.

"What were you intending to do with this lady?"

"Our orders were to see her into your house, sir. Nothing more."

"My mission in this part of the world is over," interrupted Mrs. Penn; "I shall leave it for London this afternoon. Until then, say for an hour or two, I shall be glad to find a shelter in your house, Mr. Edwin Barley."

"Very good. After that you are at liberty, I presume, to take orders from me?" he added to the officers. And they signified they were if he had any to give.

"You can then follow me to Chandos. Stay outside the house, and be ready to obey the signal I shall give you. Be prepared to take into custody a criminal who has been evading the law for years, and who will probably make a desperate resistance. What do you say? No warrant? Nonsense. I am in the commission of peace, and will absolve you of any consequences."

Laying his gun and birds on the top of the luggage, Mr. Edwin Barley turned to Chandos. Thus it happened that his voice was heard at the door, demanding to see Lady Chandos.

"My lady cannot be seen, sir," was the reply of Hickens. "She is better, I hear; but she is not yet out of her rooms. Sir Harry is within."

"Who do you say is within?" cried Mr. Edwin Barley, probably thinking his ears might deceive him.

"Sir Harry Chandos."

"Sir Harry," repeated Mr. Edwin Barley, wondering doubtless whether Hickens had lost his senses. "What do you mean by calling him that?"

"I call him nothing but what's right, sir. He is Sir Harry now, unfortunately: that is, unfortunately for poor Sir Thomas. News came this morning, sir, that Sir Thomas has been killed in battle. We have got the house shut up for him."

Mr. Edwin Barley took a step backwards, and looked at the white blinds, closely drawn behind the windows. The tidings took him by surprise. Having gone out shooting before the letters and papers were delivered, he was in ignorance of the morning's news.

"I am sorry to hear it," he said. "It is an additional blow for Lady Chandos; and she does not need it. Sir Thomas was the best of the three sons: I had no grudge against him. But Mr. Harry Chandos does not take the title, my man."

"Oh yes, he does, sir. He is now Sir Harry Chandos."

"I tell you *no*," returned Mr. Edwin Barley, with a grim smile. "He is just as much Sir Harry Chandos as I am: it is not he who comes into the title. Let it pass, however."

"Did you want him, sir?" inquired Hickens, quitting at once the controversy, like a well-trained servant.

"I do. But I would very much have preferred to see Lady Chandos first."

"That is quite out of the question, sir," concluded Hickens, as he conducted his visitor to the state drawing-room, and went to inform his master.

As will readily be understood, I have to relate things now that did not at the time come under my personal sight or hearing. Mr. Edwin Barley looked upon his prisoner as *his*—as much his own, with those two keen policemen posted outside the house and he inside it, as though George Heneage had lain at his feet manacled and fettered. He could not resist the temptation of entering the house that contained his long-evading enemy; and he stood in its state-room perfectly at ease until Sir Harry came in.

"Good morning, Mr. Chandos."

"Good morning," coldly returned Sir Harry. "To what am I indebted for the honour of this visit?"

"One object of it is to demand an explanation of your treatment of Mrs. Penn. She has brought her wrongs to me; her only living relative, as she puts it. I suppose, as such, it lies with me to ask the explanation. Mrs. Penn was engaged by Lady Chandos; engaged as a lady; and you have turned her away as a menial, subjecting her to gross indignity."

Sir Harry stared at the speaker, scarcely crediting his own ears. The exceeding impudence of the proceeding, after Mrs. Penn's treacherous conduct, was something unique.

"You will obtain no explanation from me, sir; you can apply to Mrs. Penn herself if you require one. I am disgusted at the wickedness, the false deception of the whole affair, and will not condescend to recur to it. You are not welcome in this house, Mr. Edwin Barley, and I must request you to quit it. I cannot conceive how you could have dared to come here."

"The explanation, sir," persisted Mr. Edwin Barley. "Fine words will not enable you to evade it."

He spoke as though he really required the explanation. Sir Harry did not understand it, and a few short sharp words passed on either side. Both were labouring under a mistake. Sir Harry assumed that all Mrs. Penn had done in the house had been under the express direction of Mr. Edwin Barley. Mr. Edwin Barley, on his side, was not aware that she had done anything wrong. They were at cross-purposes, and at that angry moment did not arrive at straight ones.

"Treachery," echoed Mr. Edwin Barley, in answer to a word dropped by Sir Harry. "The police will soon be in charge of one

guilty of something worse than treachery. A criminal lying under the ban of the law is not far off."

"You allude to my brother, Mr. Edwin Barley. True. He is lying not far off—very near."

The quiet words—for Sir Harry's voice had dropped to a strange calmness—took Edwin Barley by surprise. In this ready avowal, could it be that he foresaw fear to doubt that George Heneage had already again made his escape? Drawing aside the white blind, he saw one of the police-officers under the trees opposite; the other, of course, being at the back of the house. And it reassured him. Never more could George Heneage escape him.

"Your brother shall not elude me, Mr. Chandos. I swear it. I have waited for years—for years, Harry Chandos—to catch him upon English ground. That he is on it now, I know. I know that you have him in hiding: here, in the west wing of your house. Will you resign him peacefully to the two men I have outside? Revengeful though you may deem me, I would rather spare disturbance to your mother. The fact of his apprehension cannot be concealed from her: that is impossible; but I would spare her as far as I can, and I would have wished to see her to tell her this. If you do not give him up quietly, the policemen must come in."

"I think—to save you and the police useless trouble—you had better pay a personal visit to my brother," said Sir Harry. "You have rightly said that he has been in hiding in the west wing; he is there still."

"Your brother!—George!" exclaimed Mr. Edwin Barley, quite taken aback by the invitation, and suspecting some trick.

"My brother George," was the quiet answer. "Did you think I was speaking of Sir Thomas? He, poor fellow, is no longer in existence."

"As I hear: and I am sorry for it. Your servant wished to assure me that you had succeeded to the honours; he calls you 'Sir Harry.' I told him better," concluded Mr. Edwin Barley, with a cough that said much.

"I do succeed to them—more's the pity. I wish Thomas had lived to bear them to a green old age."

"Let me advise you not to *assume* them, at any rate, Harry Chandos: the time has not come for it, and the world might laugh at you. George Chandos, fugitive criminal though he has been, would succeed until proved guilty. Wait."

"You are wasting my time," rejoined Sir Harry. "Will you pay a visit to the west wing?"

"For what purpose? You are fooling me!"

"I told you the purpose—to see my brother George. You shall see him, on my word of honour."

The answer was a gesture of assent, and Sir Harry crossed the hall

to ascend the stairs. Mr. Edwin Barley slowly followed him, doubt in his step, defiance in his face. That he was thoroughly perplexed, is saying little; but he came to the conclusion, as he walked along the gallery, that George Heneage was about to beseech his clemency. His clemency! Hill opened the west wing. Seeing a stranger, she would have barred it again, but Sir Harry put her aside with calm authority, and turned into one of the rooms.

On the bed, laid out in his shroud, sleeping the peaceful sleep of death, was the emaciated form of George Heneage Chandos. Mr. Edwin Barley gazed at him, and the perspiration broke out on his forehead.

"By heaven! he has escaped me!"

"He has escaped all the foes of this world," answered Sir Harry, lowly and reverently. "He is at rest from persecution; and we are at rest from suspense and anxiety."

"It has destroyed my life's aim," observed Mr. Edwin Barley.

"And with it your thirst for revenge. When a man pursues another with the persistent hatred that you have pursued him, it can be called nothing less than revenge."

"Revenge! What do you mean? He did commit the murder."

"His hand was the hand that killed Philip King: but it was not intentional murder. He never knew exactly—at the time or since—how he fired the gun, save that his elbow caught against the branch of a tree when the gun was on cock. Some movement of his own undoubtedly caused it; he knew that; but not a wilful one. He asserted this with his dying lips before taking the Sacrament."

"Wilful or not wilful, he murdered Philip King," insisted Mr. Edwin Barley.

"And has paid for it. The banned life he has been obliged to live since was surely an expiation. His punishment was greater than he could bear; it was prolonged and prolonged, and his heart broke."

Mr. Edwin Barley had his eyes fixed on the dead face, possibly tracing the likeness to the handsome young man of nine or ten years ago.

"Of other crime towards you he was innocent," pursued Sir Harry. "He never injured you or yours; there might have been folly in his heart in the heyday of his youth and spirits; there was no sin. You have been unreasonably vindictive."

"I say no," returned Mr. Edwin Barley, striving to suppress an emotion that was rising and would not be suppressed. "Had I ever injured George Heneage, that he should come into my home and make it desolate? What had my wife or my ward done to him that he should take their lives? He killed both of them: the one deliberately, the other indirectly, for her death arose out of the trouble. Charlotte Delves — Mrs. Penn now, of whom you complain — lost her only

relative, saving myself, when she lost Philip King. And for me? I was left in that same desolate home, bereft of all I cared for, left to go through life *alone*. Few men have loved a wife as I loved mine: she was my one little ewe-lamb, Harry Chandos. Vindictive! Think of my wrongs."

Looking there at each other, the dead face lying between them, it might be that both felt there was much to forgive. Certainly Harry Chandos had never until that moment realized the misery it had brought to Edwin Barley.

"I see; we have all alike suffered. But he who caused the suffering is beyond reproach now."

"As things have turned out, the game is yours, Sir Harry," said Mr. Edwin Barley, who was too much a man of the world to persist in denying him the title, now that he found it was beyond dispute his. "For my actions I am accountable to none; and were the time to come over again, I should do as I have done."

He turned to quit the room as he spoke, and Mr. Chandos followed him downstairs. A word exchanged at their foot caused Mr. Barley to inquire what it was Mrs. Penn had done: and then Sir Harry gave him the full particulars, with the additional information that she was assumed to have been acting for him, Edwin Barley.

"She was not," said Mr. Barley, shortly. "I knew nothing of this. Placed in the house by me, Sir Harry! She placed herself in the house, as I conclude; certainly I did not place her."

"You have met her in secret in the grounds."

"I have met her accidentally, not secretly. Twice, I think it was: or three times, I am not sure. She chose to repeat things to me; I did not ask for them. Not that they were of any worth—as the unmolested retirement of George Heneage here proves."

"Has your wife's will ever been found?" asked Sir Harry, speaking upon impulse.

"What is that to you?" said Mr. Edwin Barley, turning to face him. "Do you wish to insinuate that I suppressed the will?"

"No."

"You would like me to make a merit of generosity, and offer Miss Hereford a present of the money," continued Mr. Edwin Barley, a ring of mockery in his tones.

"By no means," hastily replied Sir Harry. "Miss Hereford's future position in life will preclude her feeling the want of it. You informed me the last time I had the honour of speaking to you, that you were Miss Hereford's only relative: as such, allow me to acquaint you with the fact that she is to be my wife."

"I expected it would end in that," was Mr. Edwin Barley's answer. "And I tell you honestly that I would have removed her from here in time to prevent it, had it been in my power. I liked the child; my

wife loved her; and I had rather she married any one in the world than a Chandos. It is too late now."

"Quite too late. Although I am a Chandos, I shall hope to make her happy, Mr. Edwin Barley. I will do my best for it."

And thus the interview ended.

CHAPTER XXVI.

BACK FOR AYE AT CHANDOS.

"*Le diable n'est pas si noir que l'on dit*," runs the idiomatic saying in France. We have it also in English, as the world of course knows; but it sounds better—that is, less wrong—to give it in the former language. We girls at school there said it often; had one of us ventured on the English sentence at Miss Fenton's, that lady's eyes would have grown round with horror.

It might be applied to Mr. Edwin Barley. Looking back dispassionately, bringing reason to bear on the retrospect, I could not trace one single act or word in him that would justify me in having thought him so bad a man. Taking the colouring from my first view of him, when his dark and certainly ugly face peeped out from the avenue at Hallam, frightening me terribly; and from the dreadful events that followed, in which my childish imagination mixed him up as the worst actor, this prejudice had lived and grown in my mind. He had really done nothing to merit it. There was the abstracted will, but it was not proved that he had taken it; probably he had not. I had been too young to realize the terrible blow brought upon him through George Heneage. And, as we got to know later, the vindictive feeling with which he had pursued him through all these years had its rise in self-defence, as well as in a desire to inflict punishment. The semi-doubt cast, or to himself seeming to be cast, on Mr. Edwin Barley at the time, in the remarks that he had been the only one to profit, and that largely, by Philip King's death, had rankled in his mind, implanting there a burning anxiety, apart from other considerations, to bring to light the real criminal. For his own part, he had never for a moment doubted that it had been intentional, deliberate, cruel murder. And I have grown to think that the exaggeration he imparted to Philip King's dying words arose unwittingly in the confusion of the moment; that he was not conscious he did so exaggerate. A passive listener hears words more clearly than an actor.

Altogether, the "diable" was not so black as my fancy had painted him; indeed, I began, as days went on, to doubt whether the word would apply to Mr. Edwin Barley at all. One does not grow wise in an hour; no, nor even in a year: youth clings to its prejudices, and it takes experience, and age, and sober judgment, to subdue them.

Mr. Edwin Barley went home after quitting Chandos. Seated there, her things off, and a luncheon-tray before her, with no trace of her luggage to be seen, was Charlotte Delves—Mrs. Penn of late years. Was she intending to take up her present quarters at his house? the question mentally occurred to Mr. Edwin Barley, and it did not tend to his gratification. Not if he knew it; he had not been upon cordial terms with Charlotte Delves for years; and what he had now heard of her line of conduct at Chandos vexed him.

There must be a word or two of retrospect. Shortly after Selina's death, Mr. Edwin Barley went abroad. Not a place on the European continent but he visited, one feverish object alone swaying him—the discovering of George Heneage. The detective police were at work in England with the same view: all in vain. At the end of three years he came back home; and almost close upon it there occurred some rupture between him and Charlotte Delves, who had remained at Hallam all that time as the house's mistress. People thought she cherished visions of becoming the house's *bonâ fide* mistress, its master's wife; if so, she was lamentably mistaken. Mr. Edwin Barley was wedded to Selina and her memory; he had no intention whatever of exalting another into her place. Whether Charlotte found out this in too sudden a manner; whether the cause was totally unconnected with this, certain it was a rupture occurred; and Charlotte threw up the housekeeping, and quitted the house. She took the same kind of service with an elderly man, a connection also, of the name of Penn, who had a young daughter, Lotta. Subsequently Charlotte Delves married him, and very shortly afterwards was called upon to bury him. The young girl, Lotta, by whom her stepmother seemed to have done a good part, died within a year; and Mrs. Penn, left with a slender income, chose to go out in the world again. She became companion to a lady, and the years passed on.

Time softens most things. Mrs. Penn grew to forget her fleeting marriage, and with it the episodes of her middle life; and went back to her old likings and prejudices. Her heart's allegiance to Edwin Barley returned; she was of his kin, and the wrongs inflicted by George Heneage, temporarily forgotten, resumed all their sway within her. While she was at Marden (travelling about from place to place with Mrs. Howard) some accidental occurrence caused her to suspect that George Heneage, instead of being abroad, was in concealment in England, and within a drive of Chandos. She at once wrote news of this to Mr. Edwin Barley, with whom she had held no communication since the advent of a letter of his at her marriage. It caused him to remove himself, and four or five of his household, to the vicinity of Chandos. There he took up his abode, and spent his time watching the house and the movements of Mr. Chandos, in the hope to gain some clue to the retreat of George Heneage. With this exception, his

watching—which caused him to stroll at unorthodox hours into the groves and private paths, to peer in at windows by night—his watching was inoffensive. Mrs. Penn, on her side, seized on the opportunity afforded by Mrs. Freeman's illness (it was as though fortune favoured her), and got into Chandos. My presence in it might have been a serious countercheck, only that I did not recognize her. She did not recognize me in the first interview, not until the day when I sent in my name at Mrs. Marden's. Of course Mrs. Penn's object after that was to *keep* me in ignorance. She had really been to Nulle for a week or two; it was the autumn I first went there, had seen me at church with the school, and so tried to persuade me it was there I had seen her. Much as she wanted me away from Chandos in the furtherance of her own ends, cruel as were the means she used to try to effect it, she had, strange to say, taken a liking for me; and in her *dislike* to Mr. Chandos she had not much cared what wild untruths she told me of him, hoping to separate us effectually.

Of her effecting an entrance into Chandos as companion, Edwin Barley knew nothing. After she was settled there she looked out for him, and waylaid him in the grounds. With the change in Mrs. Penn's person, and the remarkable change in her hair, Mr. Edwin Barley had some difficulty in believing it to be Charlotte Delves. The hair was an unhappy calamity. Mrs. Penn, beguiled by fashion and confidential advertisements to wish to turn her light flaxen hair to gold colour, had experimented upon it: the result was not gold, but a glowing, permanent, scarlet-red. She told him she was watching at Chandos for his sake. Mr. Edwin Barley, an implacable man when once offended, was cool to her, declining, in a sense, to accept her services. If she made discoveries that could assist in the tracking of George Heneage, well and good; she might bring them to him: and so the interview ended.

Mrs. Penn might have made a discovery to some purpose but for two things. The one was that she was a real coward, and believed the ghost, haunting the pine-walk, to be a ghost: the other was that she took up a theory of her own in regard to the west wing; she assumed that Lady Chandos had become mad; to this she set down all the mystery enacted in it; and this view she imparted to Mr. Edwin Barley. He neither asked her to bring tales to him, nor encouraged her to do it; if she worked, she worked of her own accord; and his doors remained closed to her. At least Mrs. Penn did not choose to try whether they would be open. Until this day: and her entering them now could not be said to be of her own seeking.

She sat taking her luncheon, cold partridge and sherry. Mr. Barley entered in silence, and stood with a dark expression on his lips. Charlotte knew it of old, and saw that something had not pleased him. Things had very much displeased him; firstly, the escape of the long-sought-for prisoner; secondly, Madam Charlotte's doings at Chandos.

Mr. Edwin Barley might have winked at the peering and prying, might have encouraged the peeping into letters; but to steal things (even though but in appearance) he very much disapproved of, especially as *he* was looked upon as having instigated her.

"What's the matter, Mr. Barley?" asked Charlotte, helping herself to some more partridge. "He *is* there, is he not?"

"Who?"

"George Heneage. In the west wing."

"Yes, he's there. I've seen him."

"Ah, I knew it," she said, with a relieved sigh, and she suddenly poured out another glass of sherry, and lifted it to her lips. "Here's to your health, George Heneage! Have the police got him?"

"No. The police have gone. I dismissed them."

Charlotte flung down her knife and fork in a passion. "Dismissed them! Without taking him! Are you going to show leniency at the eleventh hour, like a weak woman, Mr. Edwin Barley? After what I have done to trace him?"

"You have done a little too much," returned Mr. Edwin Barley. And, abandoning his short and crusty answers, he spoke at length his opinion of her acts at Chandos. He was not in the humour to suppress any bitterness of tongue, and said some keen things.

Charlotte went into a real passion. What with the disappointment at finding Mr. Edwin Barley in this mood, which seemed to promise badly for her semi-idea of prolonging her stay under his roof; what with his ingratitude after all her pains; what with her recent ignominious exit from Chandos; and what with the good old sherry, that is apt to have its effects when taken at mid-day, Mrs. Penn lost control of her temper. Prudence was forgotten in passion; and Mr. Edwin Barley was doomed to listen to the wild ravings of an angry woman. Reproach for the past, for things that she had deemed wrongs in the bygone years, came out all the more freely for having been pent up within her so long. She contrasted her conduct with his: her ever anxious solicitude for his interests; his neglect and cruel non-recognition of them. As the most forcible means of impressing his ingratitude upon him, she recapitulated the benefits she had wrought one by one; talking fast and furiously. Mr. Edwin Barley, a cool man under petty grievances, listened in silence; he had said his say, said it with stinging coldness, and it was over. Feeling very much inclined to stop his ears was he, when something, further said by her, caused him to open them, as ears had never perhaps been opened yet. Charlotte had shot beyond her mark in her reckless rage; and was scarcely aware that she had done so until Mr. Edwin Barley, his face and eyes alike ablaze, seized her wrists.

She had gone too far to retract, and she brazened out her avowal, making a merit of it, rather than taking shame.

It was she who had stolen Mrs. Edwin Barley's will. She, Charlotte

Delves. She had taken it as a duty—in her regard for his, Edwin Barley's, interests. Who was the child, Anne Hereford, that she should inherit what of right belonged to him? When she had appeared to find the keys in the china basket on the mantel-shelf, it was she who had put them there ready to be found.

There ensued no reproach from Mr. Barley's lips. At first she thought he was going to strike her, staring at her with his white and working face; but the minutes passed, and he overcame his emotion. Perhaps he feared he might be tempted to strike her if he spoke; it seemed as if a blow had fallen on him—as if the depth of feeling aroused by her confession were, not so much wrath, as a sense of awful injury to himself that could never be repaired.

"What became of the will?" was the only question he put when the silence was getting ominous to her ears.

"I burnt it. It was done for you. Throughout my life I have had regard only to the interests of the Barleys. And this is my recompense—reproach and base ingratitude!"

He quitted the room without speaking another word. This was the worst dose Mr. Edwin Barley had received. He knew that the disappearance of the will had been set down by some people to his own hands. Why, had not Sir Harry Chandos hinted at as much, but an hour ago? He had treated the past insinuations with contempt, always insisting that there had been no will to abstract—for he fully believed his wife had herself repented of the testament and destroyed it. He knew how capricious Selina was; never keeping in the same mind two days together. And now he had to hear that the world was right and he wrong: the will *had* been abstracted. It did not tend to soothe him, the being told that it was taken out of regard to him and to his moneyed interests.

Altogether he deemed it well to cut short his interview with Mrs. Penn. That lady, finding the house intended to show itself inexorably inhospitable, put her bonnet on and went forth to the railway station of her own accord, her luggage behind her. Whether she should annoy Mr. Edwin Barley by sundry letters of reproach, one of the reproaches being that he had never cared for any living being but his doll of a wife; or whether she should wash her hands of him altogether, and treat him henceforth with silent contempt, she had not determined in her mind. She inclined to the letters. Taking her seat in a first-class carriage, she would have leisure to think of it and decide, on her journey to London.

And now I can go back to myself. I saw none of them all the afternoon. After the departure of Mr. Edwin Barley, Sir Harry Chandos went out with Dr. Laken. Mrs. Chandos and Madame de Mellissie were in the east wing, and, I fancied, Lady Chandos with them. Emily had offered to take Mrs. Penn's place for a short while, so far as sitting

with Mrs. Chandos went; it was one of the best-natured things I had known her do.

Oh, but it seemed to me ominous, the suffering me to sit there all the afternoon alone, no companion but myself and the oak-parlour, and with death in the house! Words, dropped by Emily to her brother about his changed position, were beating their sad refrain on my brain. His position was indeed changed: and I was but a poor governess, although I might be the descendant of the Keppe-Carews. I quite thought that the neglect now cast upon me was an earnest of proof that the family at least would not countenance my entrance into it. Well, I would do what was right, and give him back his fealty: I could but act honourably, though my heart broke over the separation that might ensue.

It was dusk when Mr. Chandos came back—the old name will slip out.

"All alone in the dark, Anne?" he said, drawing up the blind a few inches.

It gave a little more light, and I could see his features. He looked pre-occupied; but I thought the occasion had come to speak, and ought to be seized upon.

What should I say? How frame the words necessary for my task? With my hands and lips trembling, brain and heart alike beating, I asked incoherently if he would allow me to speak to him. He stood looking at me in surprise—at my evident agitation and whitening lips.

"It is only right that I should speak; I have been waiting all the afternoon to do so, Mr. Chandos—I beg your pardon, I mean Sir Harry," I brought out at last, and the very fact of speaking gave me courage. "I wish—I wish——"

"Why, Anne, what is the matter?" he asked, as a great breath, like a sob, stopped me. "What is it that you wish?"

"To tell you that I quite absolve you from anything you have said to me:" and the shame I felt at having betrayed emotion brought to me a sudden and satisfactory coldness of manner. "Please not to think any more about me. It is not your fault, and I shall not think it is. Let it all be forgotten."

A perception of my meaning flashed upon him, badly though I had expressed it. He looked at me steadily.

"Do you mean—not think further of making you my wife?"

"Yes."

"Very well. But now will you tell me why you say this?"

I hesitated. I think I was becoming agitated again: all because I knew I was getting through my task so stupidly.

"Circumstances have altered with you."

"Well, yes, in a measure. I am a trifle richer than I was, and my

wife will be Lady instead of Mrs. Chandos. Why should you object to that?"

"Oh, Mr. Chandos, you know. It is not I who would object, but your family. And—perhaps—yourself."

"Anne, I vow I have a great mind to punish you for that last word. Oh, you silly child!" he continued, putting his arms round my waist, and holding me close before him. "But that it would punish me as well as you, I'd not speak to you for three days: I'd let you think I took you at your word."

"Please don't joke. Don't laugh at me."

"Joke! laugh! I suppose you think that under the 'altered circumstances,' as you call them, I ought to renew my vows. And, by the way, I don't know that I ever did make you a formal offer: one that you could use against me in a suit of breach of promise. Miss Hereford, I lay my heart and hand at your disposal. Will you condescend to be my future wife?"

Partly from vexation, partly from a great tumult of bliss, I gave no answer. Sir Harry took one for himself. Ay, and was welcome to take it.

With my face in a burning heat,—with my heart in a glow of love, as if filled with the strains of some delightful melody,—with my whole being thrilled with rapture,—I ran upstairs, barely in time to change my dress for dinner, and nearly ran against Lady Chandos, who was coming out of the east wing.

"There are twin genii, who, strong and mighty,
Under their guidance mankind retain;
And the name of the lovely one is Pleasure,
And the name of the loathly one is Pain.
Never divided, where one can enter
Ever the other comes close behind;
And he who in pleasure his thoughts would centre,
Surely pain in the search shall find."

The good old words (and I don't at this present moment of writing recollect whose they are) came forcibly to my mind in their impressive truth. The sight of Lady Chandos changed my pleasure to pain: for I had had no warranty from *him* that she would approve of what he had been doing. Bounding into my bedroom, I stood there at the open door until she should pass: it would not do to shut it in her face, as though I had not seen her.

But instead of passing, she turned to me. While my head was bowed in silent salutation, she halted, and put her hand upon my shoulder, causing my face to meet hers. With the consciousness of whose it had just met, and very closely; with the consciousness of feeling like a miserable interloping girl, who was to be exalted into the place of her successor against her approving will, no wonder I trembled and bent my shrinking face.

"And so you are to be my daughter-in-law?"

The words were not spoken in angry pride, but in gentle kindness. I looked up and saw love in her eyes; and she might see the gratitude that shone in every line of mine.

"Harry told me last night, in the midst of our great sadness; after you had been into our poor George's room. My dear, I have heard a great deal of you since I have been upstairs in confinement, and I feel sure you will make him a good wife."

In my revulsion of feeling I clasped her hands in mine, thanking her—oh, so earnestly. "There's only one thing," I said, with the tears running down my face.

"What's that?"

"I am not good enough for him. And oh, Lady Chandos, I was so afraid you would not think me so. I have been a governess, you know. I would have given him up, I have just told him so, now he is Sir Harry Chandos."

She smiled a little. "One objection arose to me when he first spoke—that you were the niece of Mrs. Edwin Barley. But I have grown to-day to think it may be well to overcome the prejudice. Do you know what Harry says?"

I only shook my head.

"He says, as Mrs. Edwin Barley brought (I must speak freely) a curse into our house, you may be destined to bring to it a blessing as the recompense. My dear child, I think it will be so."

She inclined her head, and gave me a fervent kiss. I could have knelt to receive it. I pressed her hand as if I could not let it go. I watched her along the gallery, to the west wing, amid my blinding tears. I could hardly help lifting my voice aloft in thanks to Heaven for its great love to me. Hill came up the stairs and broke the charm.

"Why, Miss Hereford, you have no light," she said; and indeed my chamber was in darkness. "Allow me to light the branches, miss."

By the unusual attention—a solitary candle would have been good enough for me before—by the sound of her voice as she offered it, I saw she had heard the news. I could not help putting my hand into hers as she turned round from the lighted branches.

"Hill, I hope you will forget that I used to cross you about that west wing. I did not know what it was, you see. But oh, if you had only told me! I would have been so true to you all."

Old Hill put her candle down, that she might have her other hand at liberty; and she laid it upon mine, making it a prisoner.

"Miss, it is I who have got to ask pardon of you for my crossness. We were all living in so much dread, that a stranger in the house brought nothing but extra fear and trouble. But I liked you through it all; I liked your face that morning, years ago, on the Nulle steamer at London Bridge. Miss, it is the same nice face still. And, Miss

Hereford, I am not sorry to hear that you are to be for good at Chandos."

When I went to my bedroom that night, I found a fire blazing in the grate—by Hill's orders, I was sure. Ah me! with all my natural propensity to be simple-minded, my earnest wish to remain so for ever, I did feel a glow of pride at being tacitly recognized as the future mistress of Chandos.

Over this fire—a bright, beautiful fire, as befitted a dull house—I sat late, reading, musing, half dreaming. The clock struck twelve, and still I sat on.

For half an hour, or so. It was so delightful to realize my happiness; and I was in no mood for sleep. But of course sleep had to be prepared for, and I took my feet from the fender, wondering what sort of a night it was. There had been indications of frost in the evening, and I drew the heavy window-curtains back, to take a view outside. "No fear of seeing a ghost now," I too boastfully whispered.

I thought I should have fainted; I nearly dropped on the floor with startled alarm. Not at a ghost: there was none to be seen; but at something that in that startled moment seemed to me far worse.

Emerging from its progress up the avenue, at a snail's pace, as if it cared not to alarm sleepers with its echoes,—advancing, as it seemed, upon me,—came a great, black, dismal thing, savouring of the dead. A hearse. A hearse without its plumes, driven by a man in a long black cloak.

For a moment I believed I saw a phantom. I rubbed my eyes, and looked, and rubbed again, doubting what spectral vision was obscuring them. But no, it was too real, too palpable. On it came, on and on; turned round, and halted before the entrance-door.

I sat down to hold my beating heart: sure never were enacted night alarms like those I had encountered at Chandos. And, while I sat, muffled sounds as of measured footsteps smote upon my ear from the corridor. The truth flashed upon me then, and I silently drew my door an inch open.

They had gained the head of the stairs, and were stopping there, apparently hesitating how best to get down. Four of them besides Sir Harry Chandos, and they bore a coffin on their shoulders, covered with black cloth,—Dr. Laken, Hickens, and two men, who looked like carpenters. So! that was it!—the unhappy George Heneage was being removed by night!—and the stairs of the west wing, as I knew later, were too narrow.

I could not see, for the hearse was right underneath my window, but I heard the sounds as they put in the coffin, after they had got it safely down. And then the great black thing drove away again, with its slow and covert steps, some of them following it. It was going to the railway station.

Sir Harry and Dr. Laken were away for two or three days. The

funeral had taken place from the doctor's house. There was no real reason why he might not have been buried from Chandos, except that it would have created so much noise, and put the place up in arms.

And so ended the life and history of the ill-fated George Heneage Chandos. He who had been the destroyer of the family's tranquillity and its fair name, through whom, and for whom, they had lived in dread for so many years, having, as Mrs. Penn aptly expressed it, a sword hanging perpetually over their heads, which might fall at any minute,—he, the erring man, was laid to rest; and had left rest for them. With him, the fear and the dread were gone; almost the disgrace; there was no further need of secrecy, of retirement, of ghosts, of sleep-walking; there was no longer dread of a night invasion by the police. Chandos could hold up its head now in the face of day. Once more there was light in the gloomy house; the blinds were drawn up, the sunshine was allowed to shine in.

The deep mourning was supposed by all, save a few, to be worn for Sir Thomas Chandos. When Mrs. Chandos appeared in her widow's garb, people at first treated it as one of her eccentricities, but the truth got to be known in time.

Quite immediately Mr. Edwin Barley left the neighbourhood. The news of it was brought to Chandos by the agent, who did not appear to understand the thing at all. Mr. Barley's servant had called upon him, to give up the house, and to pay whatever demands there might be for rent, and else.

"Gone clean away!" cried Mr. Dexter, wiping his hot and surprised face. "The whims these rich men have! He's gone back to his own beautiful place, The Oaks. The servant (a most respectable man, Sir Harry) says the preserves there are hardly to be matched in the kingdom. He thinks his master found the shooting here poor."

Sir Harry glanced at me. It was not the poor shooting that had taken Edwin Barley from Chandos.

Only a few mornings subsequently the post brought a packet addressed to Sir Harry Chandos. When I saw it was Mr. Edwin Barley's handwriting, my heart failed me. Sir Harry read it twice over, and put it in his pocket, waiting until we should be alone.

Oh, what wonderful news he had to tell me! I sat and listened as one in a vast maze—and when Sir Harry showed me the letter, I read it twice over, as he had done, before knowing whether or not to believe it.

Mr. Edwin Barley had made over to me the amount of money left by Selina, with the full interest thereon at five per cent. up to the present date. He frankly stated that the mystery of the lost will had now been cleared up: it had been (contrary to his own opinion) abstracted, and, as he found, burnt. He did not give any hint as to the culprit; with all his sins, he was too much of a gentleman to do

that: I could acknowledge it now that my prejudices were partially removed: but we felt sure (and knew it later) that it was Charlotte Delves. This money he had caused to be settled on me to my exclusive use and benefit. He informed Sir Harry that the first instalment of the half-yearly interest was waiting to be drawn by me.

"So you are an heiress, after all," said Sir Harry, laughing. "You can buy your wedding-dress."

But I did not laugh. I was thinking how I had misjudged Mr. Edwin Barley. I had thought him so hard and unjust a man! Hard, he might be: but strictly just.

"I should like to write and thank him."

"Certainly. Write when you like, and what you like. I shall answer his letter. It contains something more, that I have not shown you."

"Am I not to see it?"

For answer Sir Harry folded the letter back, and placed a postscript before me. It seemed to me more amazing than the other.

"Should my niece, Anne Hereford, find herself less happy as Lady Chandos—your wife—than she expects to be, and wish for a refuge, my house will be open to her. If she enters it, whether in the present years or in those long to come, she will be treated in every respect as my own child; and be very amply provided for at my death."

"Do you expect you will require a refuge?"

His eyes were gleaming with merriment as he spoke it—a whole lifetime of loving affection in their depths. If mine unconsciously evoked back their great and tender trust, it was not my fault. But a hope of sometime meeting Edwin Barley, and thanking him for this new kindness; of making some little atonement for my past hatred, so far as words of gratitude could atone, rose within me as a vision.

The following week we quitted Chandos for Scarborough: I, Emily, Lady and Mrs. Chandos. There were many things to be done to the house, improvements and alterations, and Sir Harry remained to superintend them. M. de Mellissie accompanied us, on the invitation of Lady Chandos: he had come over very weak after his fever, and she said it would do him good.

We went to Heneage Grange for Christmas, and Sir Harry came to us. It was a smaller place than Chandos, very open, very pretty, and belonged to Lady Chandos for life. I was to remain and be married from thence; Lady Chandos so decided it.

The winter had passed, the spring had come before I saw Chandos again. I was then in Harry's carriage: alone with him; his dear wife, his wife of only a day or two. Chandos was very far from Heneage Grange, and we had taken the journey easily, travelling post.

I saw it as we turned round from the avenue ; and did not know it : so different was it now in its light and gay appearance from the gloomy place of the previous autumn. The trees, some of them cut down, were budding into the fresh green of spring ; the flowers were opening in their parterres ; the birds sang joyously ; the once closed and barred windows were open cheerily to the warm sun. All things spoke of hope for us, as if Nature had arrayed herself in her brightest colours.

I saw the servants in their gala clothes, with their glad faces of greeting, coming forth to welcome us, Hickens at their head, and Lizzy Dene with her bunches of black curls. The tears rained over my eyes, and Harry turned to me.

"My darling, what is grieving you?"

"Joy, I think. There is a promise of so much happiness that I cannot realize it, can scarcely believe in it. My past life has been nothing but loneliness ; can you wonder at my almost doubting the great blessings showered upon me now? Harry!"—and I looked down with a shy whisper—"it seems that I never, never can be sufficiently grateful to God."

"We will try to be so, Anne. Sufficiently, no ; but just a little, as He shall give us aid for. What has been your life, compared to the suffering of mine?—and He has lifted it from me."

He bent his head, I know in prayer. Prayer never to forget the great mercies given. The carriage stopped at the door, and he helped me out.

Once more in the old hall ; but it had light now, and bright painted windows, and all sorts of beautiful things. Hill came forward. It was a surprise. Lady Chandos had despatched her there to superintend for our reception, lending her to Chandos for a week.

"Welcome, my lady ; welcome home."

My lady ! I think it was the first time I had been addressed so, and glanced at Harry. He had me on his arm, and was leading me into the oak-parlour. The dear oak-parlour ! We might have to keep state at times, but that would ever be his favourite room and mine.

"Harry, how beautiful it all is ! Do you know who I should like to ask to come and see us first of all?"

"Well !" he said, smiling.

"Miss Annette Barlieu."

"And so we will."

Harry came into my dressing-room that night with an open Bible in his hand. He made me sit down by him while he read a chapter aloud ; and I found it was to be his usual custom, morning and evening. It was that chapter in Deuteronomy where the following verses occur ; and I knew why he had chosen it.

"And it shall be, when the Lord thy God shall have brought thee

into the land which he swore unto thy fathers, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, to give thee great and goodly cities which thou builded'st not,

"And houses full of all good things, which thou filledst not, and wells digged, which thou diggedst not, vineyards and olive-trees which thou plantedst not; when thou shalt have eaten and be full;

"Then beware lest thou forget the Lord, which brought thee forth out of the land of Egypt, from the house of bondage.

"Thou shalt fear the Lord thy God and serve him. . . . And thou shalt do that which is right and good in the sight of the Lord, that it may be well with thee.

"And it shall be our righteousness, if we observe to do all these commandments before the Lord thy God, as he hath commanded us."

"Amen!" said Harry, softly, as he closed the book, carrying it with him from the room.

And I knelt down alone to say my prayers, my heart full to overflowing with a sense of its great blessings, and lifted up in thankfulness to Heaven.

THE END.



LIFE.

A BREATH of spring, a summer breeze,
The song of birds, and budding trees;
Then autumn winds and fading flow'rs,
A biting frost, and leafless bow'rs,
With blinding sleet and stainless snow,
A wail, and out of the world we go!

Then pearly gates, and crystal streams,
Unfading flowers, and heavenly beams;—
With hopes attained and longings stilled,
And hungerings of the spirit fill'd;
Celestial songs on harps of gold,
With shouts of praise, and *Life* is told!

THE BANK PORTER'S DAUGHTER.

BY THE AUTHOR OF "FOOLISH MARGARET."

WANGSHAW'S Bank was one of the institutions of Netherfield. It was older than the oldest inhabitant. It dated from that far-away, misty epoch, when the great-grandsires of those who now did business with it walked those narrow streets with peruke and sword and buckled shoes, and when the talk yet lingered in men's mouths of the wild music heard in the distance as Prince Charles and his Highlanders marched southward through the hills on their road to Derby.

It was a substantial red-brick mansion, with stone facings, and was situate towards the lower end of High Street, which was the main artery of the town. It was supported on both sides by houses of lesser pretensions, indeed, than itself, both in size and architectural dignity, but still sufficiently genteel and comfortable to be the homes of well-to-do middle-class families. In those olden days the bank had been the home of the Wangshaws, as well as their place of business; but for the last twenty years the family, consisting of two brothers only, Hosea and Jeremiah, had resided at Dulce House, three miles away; and no sight was more familiar to the inhabitants of Netherfield than that of the Wangshaw carriage—roomy, comfortable, old-fashioned—on its way to and from the bank.

In the bank itself there was no lack of space and comfort, now that the firm had found another home. The whole of the ground floor, together with a large portion of the cellarge, was needed for business purposes. The rooms on the first floor were chiefly used as receptacles for the books and documents having relation to past transactions of the firm. On this same floor was a bedroom and a small sitting-room, for the use of the junior clerk of the establishment, who, from time immemorial, had been required to reside on the premises. A storey higher were the private apartments of Matthew Backhouse, head-porter to Wangshaw Brothers, and son and grandson of defunct head-porters who had lived and died in the service of the firm. Matthew was a widower, but he had one child, a daughter, Martha, who had just entered on her twentieth year when she comes before us.

A fair-haired, pleasant-tempered girl was Martha Backhouse, with manners and appearance that were superior to her position. She had been carefully educated at the expense of her godfather, Hosea Wangshaw, with whom, as also with his brother, she was a great favourite. Martha might have had a wide choice of suitors, even in a small town like Netherfield, for there was a rumour abroad—whence propagated

no one could have told—that she was not forgotten in her godfather's will: but her affections were in the safe keeping of Will Trafford, a young man living at Dipplewade, a small town twelve miles away. Every second Sunday Will walked over to Netherfield, to spend the day with his beloved, and trudged the twelve long miles back again at night, for there was neither rail nor coach between the two towns.

Mr. Harry Dacres, the junior clerk who resided on the premises, was a pleasant scapegrace of twenty, whose natural inclination for sowing an unlimited quantity of "wild oats" was in some measure restrained by a sense of the responsibilities of his position, and by the need of his keeping in what he called the "good books" of Wangshaw Brothers. After office hours, Mr. Harry Dacres, Matthew Backhouse, and his daughter, remained the sole inmates of the old mansion. There was an inferior being in a faded livery, who cleaned out the offices and attended to the fires, but he never by any chance slept on the premises.

When Christmas Day falls on a Saturday, which was the case with that particular Christmas with which we have now to do, it is so far convenient that it affords hard-worked people two whole days' cessation from business. Mr. Harry Dacres, considering himself as one of the hard-worked, did not fail to ask for, and obtain, a four days' holiday wherewith to recruit his exhausted energies. Harry was going to his home, forty miles away. He was to start by the 4 P.M. train on Christmas Eve; but he little dreamed, as he nodded a smiling farewell to his brother clerks, that he stood under the roof of Wangshaw Brothers for the last time.

At the last stroke of five, Matthew took down his heavy bunch of keys, and began the solemn ceremonial of locking up the bank. The usual Christmas turkey and half-dozen of port had been sent in by the firm. The usual crisp five-pound note had been pressed into his reluctant palm. Therefore was the soul of Matthew supremely content; and as he plodded with his bunch of keys from one room to another, he whistled softly to himself, and had pleasant anticipatory visions of the morrow's feast. When he had seen that everything was properly secured, he went upstairs and had a cheerful cup of tea with his daughter. After tea he strolled down to the "White Hart," to enjoy his evening pipe and glass of grog—more than one glass probably, but all in a sedate and solemnly convivial fashion; for Matthew, in his most abandoned moments, never forgot the responsibilities with which he was entrusted by Wangshaw Brothers.

It was close upon eleven when he got back to the Bank. Martha, as usual, opened the door in answer to his tug at the house-bell. She had been busy all the evening with her preparations for the morrow's festival, to which her sweetheart was invited. Late as it was, there was one task still to do; so her father sat and smoked a last pipe in the

chimney-corner, while she decorated the room with mistletoe and holly. She had just done, and was pausing with some surplus sprays of greenery in her hands to mark the effect of her labours, when both she and her father were startled by an imperative ring at the bell, followed immediately by a loud knocking.

Matthew withdrew his pipe from his mouth, and turned a slow, startled look on his daughter; but before he had time to say a word, Martha was speeding downstairs in answer to the summons. She was back again in a couple of minutes, looking very pale and excited.

"A telegram, father, from London," she said. "I hope it contains no bad news."

"Read it, girl," said Matthew, with a solemn wave of his pipe.

Martha tore open the envelope, and read as under:—

"From a FRIEND, London, to MATTHEW BACKHOUSE, Wangshaw's Bank, Netherfield."

"Come up by first train. Your mother is not expected to live many hours."

"Poor dear grandmother!" said Martha, with tears in her eyes.

"Eighty-three, come seventh of next May. A great age—a very great age," said Matthew, gravely, as he knocked the ashes out of his pipe. "The up mail is due here at 12.30. Get me my coat and my bag ready, and put me a drop of brandy into a little bottle. Eighty-three—a great age!"

When it was time for her father to start, Martha went downstairs with him to let him out, and to fasten the door behind him. On the step he kissed her, and gave her a few final directions.

"Look well after the keys, girl," he said. "If I should not be back by Monday morning, you can open the place just as well as I can, and you will explain to the firm the reason of my being away."

Martha watched her father up the frosty street till he turned a corner and was lost to view. Then she crept back indoors, tearful and sad at heart; and after bolting and rebolting the massive side-door, she went slowly upstairs, and so into the cheerful sitting-room, whose decorations now seemed such a mockery, and shut the door behind her. Although midnight had struck some time ago, she felt in no humour for bed. She was not in the least afraid. She was affected by no superstitious tremors at the thought of having to pass the night all alone in that grim old mansion. Her pulse beat equably; her nerves were unmoved. Her thoughts were with the poor dying old woman, whom she had not seen since she was quite a child. She followed her father, in imagination, on his long, dark journey to that great city whither she had never been. If she could only have gone with him! But that was merely the wish of a moment, gone almost as soon as conceived. Then, with a sigh, she thought how changed the morrow would be from the

merry little festival which she had been looking forward to for weeks. To be sure, dear Will would be there by ten o'clock at the latest ; but how could they two enjoy themselves with her father away, and on such an errand ? This thought of Will brought to mind the last letter he had written her, and in what loving language it was couched. It would do her good to read it once more. She crossed the floor, and unlocked her workbox, and took out the letter. Then she went back to the fire-light, for her candle had died out some time ago, and she had not cared to light another ; and kneeling on the hearth-rug, she read over, by the fitful blaze, words which she already knew by heart.

She was still kneeling, with the letter between her fingers, gazing into the slowly dying embers, when a low sound struck her ear which thrilled every nerve in her body with a sudden terror, and paralyzed for a moment or two every faculty save that of listening. The sound she had heard was the creaking of a loose plank on the landing, immediately below that on which the bank-porter's rooms were situate. It was a sound that had been familiar to her ears for the last half-dozen years. Her father had often talked about having the plank properly fastened down, but it had never been done. On one point Martha was as positive as she was of her own existence : that the plank never creaked except when some one walked across it. Whose foot was it that had pressed it just now ? That was the question which she put to herself in breathless terror—she, a lone girl in that weird old house, and the time an hour after midnight. She turned a white, set face and staring eyes full on the shut door, expecting momentarily to see it opened from without. She was listening as she had never listened before for a repetition of the sound that had so startled her. But all was silent, with a silence as of the grave. She could hear the straining beat of her own heart. At the end of a minute, that had seemed as long as an ordinary hour, she rose slowly, and as it were mechanically, to her feet. On the table were an unlighted candle and a box of matches. She struck a match, and lighted the candle. Then, with the candlestick held aloft in her right-hand, and with her left pressed against her beating heart, she slowly crossed the floor. She hesitated for a moment when she reached the door, and the uplifted candlestick trembled in her hand. Then, with a sudden burst of resolution, she turned the handle, and flung the door wide open.

She flung wide the door, and saw before her two masked figures, who, unheard by her, had crept up the carpeted stairs. She had scarcely time to cry, "Who are you?" before they sprang at her. Her light was dashed to the ground ; their arms were wound round her, and held her like a vice ; and a stern voice whispered in her ear—

"Make the slightest noise, and you are a dead woman. Do as you are told, and no harm shall befall you."

As if to add emphasis to these words, Martha, with a shudder, felt the cold barrel of a pistol pressed against her forehead.

"Only release me, and tell me what it is you wish me to do!"

Her voice sounded strange in her own ears.

"Let go of her, and strike a light," said he who had first spoken to the other.

The second one did as he was told, and the one who seemed the leader so far followed his companion's example as to take his arms from around Martha, and to hold her merely by a firm grip of the wrist.

"Beware!" he said, menacingly. "Do not attempt to deceive me, or to play off any tricks upon me, or——" The click of his pistol finished the sentence more forcibly than any words could have done.

As soon as the candle was relighted, Martha had an opportunity of examining her captors more closely. Their faces were covered with black crape veils, in which were cut holes for eyes and mouth. They were dressed in two uniform suits of dark grey, almost like prison suits, and were shod with some soft material that deadened the sound of their footsteps.

Through all Martha's terror a vivid feeling of wonder was at work in her mind as to the means by which these two unknown men had obtained admission into the bank. She could only conclude that they must have crept in, unseen by any one, and have afterwards secreted themselves in one of the empty rooms below stairs; although how such a thing should have been undetected by her father, whose daily careful examination of the premises was well known to her, was a mystery which just now she was unable to fathom.

Not much time was allowed her for surmise. A remark from the second man recalled her thoughts to the scene before her.

"Here's a bunch of keys!" he cried. "Most likely these are what we want first of all."

"Whose keys are these, and what do they open?" asked the man who was holding Martha by the wrist.

"They are my father's keys," said Martha, "and they open the different rooms and places downstairs."

"Do they open the cellar and the strong box in which the money is kept?"

"One of them is the key of the door at the top of the stairs leading down to the cellar. The key of the door at the bottom of the stairs and the key of the strong-box are not there."

"In whose possession are those keys?"

"One pass-key is in the possession of Mr. Jeremiah Wangshaw; the other is in the possession of Mr. Hosea. No one can obtain admission to the cellar during their absence."

"You will oblige by accompanying us downstairs, and pointing out which keys open certain doors."

Still holding her by the wrist, but in other respects acting with perfect politeness towards her, the masked man conducted Martha down the wide old staircase till they reached the ground-floor of the Bank, the second man following closely behind. As they went down the lowest flight of stairs, Martha was startled to see a third masked figure—a woman this time, and clothed in a grey mantle from head to foot—who lighted their downward progress with a slender ray from the lantern in her hand. They halted for a moment at the foot of the stairs.

"Is it not possible," said the leader, to Martha, "that the pass-key of one or both the Brothers Wangshaw may be locked up in the desk in their private office?"

"It is possible, but not very likely," answered Martha.

"Still, we may as well ascertain whether such is the case or not."

At the leader's command, Martha pointed out the key which opened the door of the private office, and then the desk at which the brothers generally sat, one facing the other. A small jet of gas, commonly made use of for melting sealing-wax, was now lighted—a greater light might have betrayed them to some passer-by in the street; a bag, containing a number of housebreaking implements, swathed in flannel, was next produced; and after five minutes' careful manipulation by the second man of the two implements selected by him from the rest, the desks of both the brothers were forced open, and their contents laid bare. There was no key in either of them. A very brief examination sufficed to convince the leader of that fact. With a muttered oath, he turned away.

"Five minutes' honest labour lost," he said. "We must now try the gently persuasive power of our flannel-clothed friends here. I have never yet known them to fail."

Then, still holding Martha by the wrist, he led the way out of the office, and along the corridor that led to the heavy oaken door, thickly studded with iron bolts, which opened on to the flight of stairs by which access was had to the cellar. As before, he requested Martha to point out the proper key; and, as before, Martha complied. Farther than this the keys would not aid them. The door yielded readily, falling back of its own accord as the bolts were withdrawn, and revealing a gloomy flight of stone stairs, ending in an iron door. Motioning to his second to keep a watchful eye on Martha, the leader took the lantern, and descended the steps. He reappeared in the course of a couple of minutes, and led the way back to the private office without a word. Once there, he turned and spoke to Martha.

"I must compliment you on your sensible conduct in this affair," he said. "Now, however, you must be left to your own reflections for a while. Excuse me if, before I go, I put it out of your power to frustrate my designs, and make a prisoner of you for the next few

hours. What has to be done shall be done with as much regard for your comfort as is possible under the circumstances. Chère amie, the cord."

The last sentence was addressed to the masked woman, who, up to this time, had been a mere looker-on. Now, however, she started into sudden activity. In obedience to a sign from the leader, she placed Martha with her back to a large iron pillar which supported the roof of the office. From some hidden pocket she next produced a coil of long, thin cord, and with it proceeded to tie Martha firmly to the pillar. Her arms were left at liberty till the last. When all else was done, they were fastened together at the wrists with a band of some strong woven stuff, which held them as surely as if they had been gyved with iron.

"To have fastened your arms down to your sides for a couple of hours would have been a refinement of cruelty of which, in your case, I have no wish to be guilty," said this Grandison of housebreakers. "One little point still remains. You must give me your word that you will not cry out, or call in any way for assistance, otherwise I shall be under the unpleasant necessity of having you gagged. If you give me your word, I have sufficient confidence in you to believe that you will keep it. How say you? Is your tongue to be made a prisoner, or no?"

"I give you my word not to cry out or create any alarm by calling for help," said Martha, after a few moments' silent thought.

"That is enough. I trust you."

Another moment, and Martha was alone.

As before stated, the room in which the girl was confined was the private office of Wangshaw Brothers. It was a comfortable room. The floor was covered with a faded Turkey carpet, and the old-fashioned mahogany fittings were almost black with age. The only light at present was that given by the small gas-jet before mentioned. It was just sufficient to enable Martha to make out the familiar features of the room.

She began to breathe more freely as soon as she was left alone. The first shock to her nerves had been a severe one; but when she saw that no real harm was intended her so long as she obeyed the orders of her captors, her composure had quickly returned; and now a warm flush of hope ran through her at the thought that there was just a faint possibility of escape. But she quickly found, when she tried to free herself from her bonds, that she had underrated the skill of the woman who had tied her to the pillar. She was as absolutely helpless as a child of a year old would have been under similar circumstances. Again and again, with desperate energy, she struggled to free herself; but the sole result, as it seemed, was to make her bonds faster than before. It is true that her arms were partly at liberty, but her wrists were so firmly tied together as to render her hands completely useless.

The last flicker of hope died out in her heart, and she resigned herself with bitter patience to her fate.

She had little fear that the burglars would succeed in reaching the secret golden store of Wangshaw Brothers. Before they could touch a single sovereign they must force open two iron doors of immense strength. These doors Martha had always been taught to look upon as impregnable; and she smiled to herself to think how utterly futile the efforts of the two masked men would be. She knew nothing of those modern improvements in the science of housebreaking which would seem to make light of the strongest safes that can be constructed.

When Martha had fully made up her mind that it was impossible for her to escape, she set about calculating how long her imprisonment was likely to last. It was now about half-past one, A.M., and at ten o'clock Will Trafford would be here to spend his Christmas Day at the Bank. If not set at liberty before that time—and she could hardly hope to be so, seeing that the burglars would require some time to get clear away after leaving the Bank—she might calculate upon being released on the arrival of her sweetheart. He would naturally be surprised at finding his summons unanswered, an alarm would be raised, and finally she, Martha, would be discovered, and set at liberty. But eight hours and a half of imprisonment—and such imprisonment!—was a long and dreadful time to look forward to. This thought was still in her head when the masked woman came gliding noiselessly into the office, with the intention of seeing that her prisoner was still safe. The readjustment of a knot or two satisfied her.

"You have been trying to escape, and you have found that you cannot," she said, as she turned to go. "Take my advice, and rest quietly. At such a time as this we do not stick at trifles."

"Who can the woman be?" asked Martha of herself. "What a strange thing for a female to be mixed up in such an affair!"

More dreary minutes passed: how many she could not have told. She was dreadfully cramped, and the cord by which she was fastened seemed biting into her very flesh. All ordinary thoughts were being gradually swallowed up in a pain that with every minute was becoming more unbearable. It was all that she could do to refrain from crying aloud. She bit her under lip in her agony, and moaned below her breath; but there was no one to hear her. Suddenly, when her torture was at the sharpest, there flashed into her brain a thought so startling, so unexpected, that for a moment her every pain was deadened in the rush of utter surprise with which it overwhelmed her.

There had been revealed to her at one glance a sure and speedy mode of escape.

She stood for a few seconds almost breathless, trying to steady her brain. Yes: there it was before her very eyes, a sure and speedy mode of escape, but not a painless one. Anything but a painless one, indeed,

but still one that must be carried out at all costs to herself. She was in torture already; and that other torture which she must undergo for the sake of liberty might be sharper, perhaps, but it would soon be over. But she would not give herself time to argue the point, lest her courage should fail her. She would put herself to the immediate proof.

The pillar to which Martha was tied was within a yard of the desk that had been broken open. Close to the edge of this desk was the upright gaspipe from which sprang the small jet, still alight, of which mention has already been made. By stretching out her arms, Martha could reach this jet. She could do more than that: she could hold her wrists over it, and let the flame burn away the band by which they were fastened together; and her hands once at liberty, the rest would quickly follow. This was the method of escape that had flashed like an inspiration across her brain, and she now proceeded to put it in operation.

She drew in her breath, and locked her teeth, and pushed out her hands with a quick movement, and so held them extended while the jet of flame played on her wrists and on the band that held them together. She shut her eyes involuntarily, and her eyebrows came together in a frown of agony. The tiny jet played lightly against the band that held her, which presently burst into a flame. Even then she did not falter. Her arms might have been made of steel, so fixed and rigid were they, so sternly was she bent on accomplishing the thing she had set herself to do. In a few moments—moments that to her seemed hours—the blazing ligature gave way, curling itself swiftly back like a burning serpent, and her hands were free.

Her hands were free, and they fell helplessly by her sides. She gave utterance to a long sigh—a sigh that was half a sob; then her chin drooped on her breast, and for a little while she knew nothing.

Martha's return to her senses was quickened by the pain from which she was still suffering. After one bewildered glance round, she came back to a knowledge of her true situation, and of the peril that was still before her. With a great effort of will she pulled herself together, and, despite her pain, began, with quick and nimble fingers, to unloosen one of the knots in the cord by which she was fastened. This offered no long opposition to her efforts; and the first knot unloosened, the rest quickly followed. In two minutes more, Martha Backhouse was a free woman. A deep, silent thanksgiving went up from her heart as the last fold of cord dropped to the floor.

She was so cramped by her bonds that for a little while she was unable to move. She stood thinking, as well as the torture she was in would allow her to think. Hitherto she had had no thought except how to free herself; but now that fact was accomplished, what ought her next move to be? She was still far from being out of peril. The

masked woman might come back at any moment, and discover all. In that case would her life be worth a moment's purchase? Evidently the first thing to do, if such a thing were possible, was to make her escape from the Bank without alarming the thieves in the bullion cellar. The next thing was to raise an alarm, and endeavour to effect their capture before they had time to get clear away with their booty. If only those two great objects could be combined! The thought thrilled her heart through and through.

She stooped and took off her shoes without as much noise as would have frightened a mouse. Then she stood listening for a moment, with all her senses on the alert. There was a noise of voices, broken, faint, and hollow, with now and then a dull, solid thud, like the muffled blow of some heavy implement. They were still in the cellar, then, and their task as yet was unaccomplished.

Step by step, and silent as a shadow, she crept out of the office, and so along the passage leading to the cellar. A faint light, which shone up the cellar-stairs, and was reflected on the opposite wall of the corridor, betrayed where the nefarious work was still going on. Towards this light Martha now crept with a sort of stealthy swiftness. When she had reached the edge of it, she stood for a moment and listened. Then, keeping her body well out of sight, she protruded her head within the line of light, and looked. Her gaze went down the stone staircase and into the cellar. The iron-door at the foot of the stairs had been forced open, and the thieves were now busy with the great safe itself. Various housebreaking implements were scattered about the floor. One of the men was busy with a crowbar, swathed in flannel, which he was using as a lever to force open one of the doors of the safe. The second man was busy drilling holes in another door with a strange-looking implement, the like of which Martha had never seen before. The woman was lighting these operations with a lamp, held aloft in one of her hands. All three were standing with their backs to the staircase. Martha's eyes took in the entire picture at a glance.

There was one thing besides which they took in—to wit, the bunch of keys with which she had opened the door at the top of the stairs. This bunch of keys was now lying on the landing at the bottom of the stairs, close to the iron-door. Could she but obtain possession of it, she saw, not only a way of escape for herself, but a way by which the thieves might be caught in their own trap. But to obtain possession of the keys without disturbing the thieves was the one difficult thing to do. There was only one mode of obtaining them, and that was to fetch them. But to do this unseen and unheard, seemed at the first glance utterly impossible. At the second glance it seemed a little more feasible, but still a dangerous thing to do. Nevertheless, she at once made up her mind that it must be attempted. Fortunately, the broken

door at the foot of the stairs had not been pushed quite back to the wall, in consequence of which its bulk now intercepted part of the light of the lamp held by the woman, so that that portion of the landing which was behind the door lay in deep shadow, and this shadow extended itself in a narrow strip from the bottom of the stairs to the top. It was down this strip of blackness, herself a moving shadow, that Martha now began to glide on her dangerous errand. Fortunately, her dress was a dark one, and her feet were unshod. Her sole chance of safety lay in the fact of the three people below stairs being so intently occupied that they would neither see nor hear her; and Martha judged that they were so occupied, because, for the last few minutes, conversation among themselves had almost entirely ceased. The grand crisis of their labours was evidently at hand.

With her back and hands pressed close to the wall, so as to keep herself within as small a space as possible, and with the skirts of her dress kept close about her, Martha began to move slowly down the stairs.

Her face was very white, but filled with a fine resolution. From her present position the inmates of the cellar were not visible to her; but both eyes and ears were painfully on the alert, and they told her that so far everything was safe. By an inch at a time, as it seemed, and so slowly that her advance was almost imperceptible, Martha kept descending steadily. In all there were fifteen stairs to go down: she had counted them many a time; and as each one was now cleared and left behind, her heart gave a little extra throb, and she felt that by so much was her task nearer completion, and that by so much had her danger become more imminent. When a dozen stairs had been passed in safety, she paused for a moment or two in her progress. The beating of her heart sounded so unnaturally loud and strange in her own ears, that she was afraid those in the cellar would hear it too. But in a little while her heart grew stiller, her fainting resolution revived, and she moved onward again.

Thirteen. Fourteen. Fifteen. The first part of her task was over. She stood at the foot of the stairs, the iron-door close beside her, the bunch of keys within half a yard of her feet. The next difficult thing to do was to pick up the keys, which were threaded on a steel ring, without being heard by the thieves. She was just on the point of stooping to make the attempt when the woman inside the cellar spoke.

"You must do without me for a minute or two, Fred," she said, "while I go and look after my prisoner."

She set down her lamp, and had got so far on her way upstairs that, by putting out a hand, Martha could have touched her dress, when the harsh voice of the man recalled her.

"Your prisoner is quite safe," he said, "and I cannot spare you just

now. You must hold the light for a few minutes longer : I cannot get on without you."

The woman went back, and Martha breathed again.

Now or never. Martha stooped, and put out her hand with a quick, stealthy movement, and felt the keys between her fingers. How to gather them, and lift them off the ground without making the slightest noise ? Even this difficulty was conquered at last. The hand holding the keys was drawn back into shadow, and still there was no alarm. The remainder of her task seemed easy. It was only to get back undetected to the top of the stairs. She was going back slowly, but not as slowly as she had come down, and had accomplished about one-third of the return journey, when an exclamation from one of the men below told her that she had not an instant to lose, and that she had better make a rush for safety.

"The keys ! Where are the keys ?" he exclaimed, having turned round instinctively, as it were: "They were here not five minutes ago."

As he sprang forward, Martha, no longer hidden, made a rush up the remaining stairs. At this apparition he stopped point blank in sheer amazement. The second man, more quick-witted than his comrade, drew a pistol from his belt, and fired. Martha had just put her foot on the top step when she felt something strike her sharply on the shoulder. She staggered forward into the corridor, wheeled quickly round, and flung herself—head, arms, body—against the oaken door, which, yielding to her strength, turned on its well-oiled hinges, and, with a little triumphant click, as its spring-bolt shot home, shut up, as in a trap, the three thieves below.

Without the key, this door, which locked of itself when pushed to, could be opened neither from one side nor the other ; with the key, it could be opened on either side. Hence the necessity for Martha to obtain, at every risk, the bunch of keys, which, besides several others, contained the particular one that belonged to the oaken door.

The door had scarcely been shut a second, as it seemed, before the two men inside began tearing and beating at it like madmen, trying to escape. Their language made Martha shudder and stuff her fingers into her ears. Now that the door was shut, she was completely in the dark ; and so, with her fingers still in her ears, she ran along the corridor and back into the private office, where the small gas-jet was still burning.

She stood here for a moment or two like one bewildered, staring helplessly about her, not knowing which way to turn next. She felt an odd, numb sensation in her left shoulder. She put her hand up to it, and withdrew it, marked with blood. This was almost more than she could bear, and only the strong sense there was upon her of a duty unfulfilled kept her from fainting. Still holding her bunch of keys, she

went out of the office and down a passage that led to the side entrance. She was trembling now, and had scarcely strength enough to unfasten the heavy door. At last it was open. She flitted out, and sped down the street in search of assistance. On reaching the first corner, she nearly stumbled into the arms of a constable, who was coming the opposite way. What sort of an incoherent story she told him she could never afterwards remember; but it must have been to the purpose.

No one could have been more surprised than Martha herself was, when she came to her senses, to learn that the thieves were none other than a certain *soi-disant* Captain Bromley, his wife, and his servant, who, some four months previously, had become the tenants of an empty house that stood next door to the bank. They were complete strangers in the town, and the only person whose acquaintance they seemed to cultivate was Mr. Harry Dacres, the junior clerk. The reason of this came out at the examination of the prisoners. From that garrulous but simple young gentleman the sham captain had obtained certain information respecting the bank—its offices, its cellars, the position of its safes, the mode and time of locking up, &c.—all of which was needful for the successful working of his deep-laid scheme. The telegram to Matthew Backhouse was simply a ruse to get the old man out of the way. An examination of the premises at once revealed Captain Bromley's reasons for locating himself so close to the bank. A portion of the brickwork in the cellar of the house tenanted by him had been taken down, and an excavation made through the few feet of earth that intervened between it and the Bank cellars. Everything had been so well arranged that the displacement of a few bricks on Christmas Eve was all that was required to introduce the thieves into the bank premises. The rest we know. On the trial it came out that the so-called captain was an old offender: a man originally of good education and attainments, but who, years ago, had gone irrecoverably to the bad.

Martha's wound was not a dangerous one, but her nerves had been severely shaken, and some time elapsed before she thoroughly recovered from the effects of that terrible night. She and Will Trafford were married in the course of the following autumn. The bride was given away by the elder brother of the firm. A stool in the Bank was offered to Will, and accepted by him. In the course of the years that have gone by since that time, he has risen to be the most confidential and trusted servant of Wangshaw Brothers.

Mr. Harry Dacres never reappeared at the bank. When he heard of what had happened, he at once sent in his resignation, with a letter expressive of his deep regret; and then, without waiting for an answer, he set off to join a brother in America.

FORFEITS.

I.

FORFEITS to pay,
Demoiselles fair,
Cavaliers gay ;
Prizes are rare !

Cupid is crier : Only a sigh,
Breathed in the silence, quickly to die.
Blushes unnumbered ; they will not last,
Fading like sunlight, night overcast.

May be a tress, golden as light ;
May be a touch of the hand ;
May be a silken favour as white ;
A kiss from the long fingers fanned !
May be a promise, won in surprise ;
May be a smile as you part ;
May be a glance from pitiful eyes ;
May be the loss of a heart.

II.

Forfeits to pay,
Demoiselles fair,
Cavaliers gay ;
Prizes to share !

Vanquished is victor ; won with a smile,
Bending a cheek to the conquered the while.
Trifles are tell-tales : 'kerchief, a glove,
Tokens of friendship ripening to love.

May be a vow, broken ere morn ;
May be a dream of the night ;
May be a jealous fancy forlorn ;
A flash from Love's own vivid light.
May be a whisper, fickle and vain ;
May be love-carols to sing ;
May be a troth, breathed again and again ;
May be a simple gold ring.

WILLIAM DUTHIE.

REALITY, OR DELUSION?

PEOPLE like ghost stories at Christmas, so I'll tell one. It is every word true. And I don't mind confessing that for ages afterwards some of us did not care to pass the place alone at night.

We were staying at Crabb Cot. Lena had been ailing during the autumn, and in October Mrs. Todhetley proposed to the Squire that they should remove her there for a change. Which was done.

The Worcestershire people call North Crabb a village, but you might count the houses in it, little and great, and not find them four-and-twenty. South Crabb, half a mile off, is larger; but the church and school are at North Crabb. And I need not have mentioned South Crabb at all, for what there is to tell has nothing to do with it.

John Ferrar had been employed by Squire Todhetley as a kind of over-looker of the estate, or working bailiff. He had died the previous winter; leaving nothing behind him except some debts, for he was not provident, and his handsome son Daniel. Daniel Ferrar disliked work: he used to make a show of helping his father, but it came to little. Old Ferrar had not put him to any trade or particular occupation; and Daniel, who was as proud as Lucifer, would not turn to it of himself. He liked to be a gentleman. All he did now was to work in his garden, and feed his fowls, ducks, rabbits, and pigeons, of which he kept a great quantity, selling them to the good houses around and sending them to market.

But, as everybody said, poultry would not maintain him. Mrs. Lease, in the pretty cottage hard by, grew tired of saying it. He used to run in and out there at will since he was a boy, and was now engaged to be married to Maria. She would have a little money, and the Leases were respected in North Crabb. People began to whisper a query of how Ferrar got his corn for the poultry: he was not known to buy much; and he would have to go out of his house at Christmas, for the owner of it, Mr. Coney, had given him notice. Mrs. Lease, anxious about Maria's prospects, asked him what he intended to do then, and he answered, "Make his fortune: he should begin to do it as soon as he could turn himself round." But the time had gone on, and the turning round seemed to be as far off as ever.

After Midsummer, a niece of the schoolmistress's had come to the school to stay: her name, Harriet Roe. Henriette she had been

christened, for her mother was French; but North Crabb, not understanding French, converted it into Harriet. She was a showy, free-mannered, good-looking girl, and made speedy acquaintance with Daniel Ferrar; or he with her. They improved upon it so rapidly that Maria Lease grew jealous, and North Crabb said he cared for Harriet a thousand times more than for Maria. When Tod and I got home the latter end of October, to spend the Squire's birthday, things were in this state. James Hill, the new bailiff, gave us the account of matters in general. Daniel Ferrar had been drinking lately, Hill added, and his head was not strong enough to stand it; and he was also beginning to look as if he had a heap of care upon him.

"A nice lot, he, for them two women to be fighting for," cried Hill, who was no friend to Ferrar. "There'll be mischief between 'em if they don't draw in a bit. Maria Lease is next kin to mad over it, I know; and t'other, knowing herself the best liked, crows over her. It's something like the Bible story of Leah and Rachel, young gents; Dan Ferrar likes the one, and he's bound by law of promise to the t'other. As to the French jade," concluded Hill, giving his head a toss, "she'd make a show of liking any man that followed her, she would; a dozen of 'em on a string."

It was all very well for Hill to call Daniel Ferrar a "nice lot," but he was the best-looking fellow in church on Sunday morning—well-dressed too. But his colour seemed brighter, and his hands shook as they were raised, often, to push back his hair, that the sun shone in upon through the south window, turning it to gold. He scarcely looked up, not even at Harriet Roe, with her dark eyes roving everywhere, and her streaming pink ribbons. Maria Lease was pale, quiet, and nice, as usual; she had no beauty, but her face was sensible, and her deep grey eyes had a strange and curious earnestness. The new parson preached, a young man just appointed to the parish of Crabb. He went in for great observance of Saints' days, and told his congregation that he should expect to see them at church on the morrow, which would be the Feast of All Saints.

Daniel Ferrar walked home with Mrs. Lease and Maria after service, and got invited to dinner. I ran across to shake hands with the old dame, who had once nursed me through an illness, and promised to look in and see her later. We were going back to school on the morrow. As I turned away, Harriet Roe passed, her pink ribbons and her cheap gay silk dress gleaming in the sunlight. She stared at me, and I stared back again. And now, the explanation of matters being over, the real story begins. But I shall have to tell some of it as it was told by others.

The tea-things waited on Mrs. Lease's table in the afternoon; waited for Daniel Ferrar. He had left them shortly before to go and attend to his poultry. Nothing had been said about his coming back for tea: it

had been looked upon as a matter of course. But he did not make his appearance, and the tea was taken without him. At half-past five the church-bell rang out for evening service, and Maria put her things on. Mrs. Lease did not go out at night.

"You are starting early, Maria. You'll be in church afore other people."

"That won't matter, mother."

A jealous suspicion lay on Maria—that the secret of Daniel Ferrar's non-return was his having fallen in with Harriet Roe—perhaps had gone of his own accord to seek her. She walked slowly along. The gloom of dusk, and a deep dusk, had stolen over the evening, but the moon would be up later. As Maria passed the school-house, she halted to glance in at the window, the shutters were not closed yet, and the room was lighted by the blaze of the fire. Harriet was not there. She only saw Miss Timmens the mistress, who was putting on her bonnet before a little hand-glass propped upright on the mantel-piece. Without warning, Miss Timmens turned and threw open the window. It was only for the purpose of pulling-to the shutters, but Maria thought she must have been observed, and spoke.

"Good evening, Miss Timmens."

"Who is it?" cried out Miss Timmens in answer, peering into the dusk. "Oh it's you, is it, Maria Lease! Have you seen anything of Harriet? She went off somewhere this afternoon, and never came in to tea."

"I have not seen her."

"She's gone to the Batleys' I'll be bound. She knows I don't like her to be with the Batley girls; they make her ten times flightier than she would be."

Miss Timmens drew in her shutters with a jerk, without which they would not close, and Maria Lease turned away.

"Not at the Batleys'; not at the Batleys'; but with *him*," she cried, in bitter rebellion, as she turned away from the church, not to it. Was she to blame for wishing to see whether she was right or not?—for walking about a little in the thought of meeting them? At any rate it's what she did. And had her reward; such as it was.

As she was passing the top of the withy walk their voices reached her ear. People often walked there, and it was one of the ways to South Crabb. Maria drew back amidst the trees, and they came on: Harriet Roe and Daniel Ferrar, walking arm-in-arm.

"I think I had better take it off," Harriet was saying. "No need to invoke a storm upon my head. And that would come in a shower of sharp hail from stiff old Aunt Timmens."

The answer seemed one of quick assent, but Ferrar spoke low. Maria Lease had hard work to control herself: anger, passion, jealousy, all blazed up. With her arms stretched out to a friendly tree on

either side,—with her heart beating,—with her pulses coursing on to fever-heat, she watched them across the bit of common to the road. Harriet went one way then, he another in the direction of Mrs. Lease's cottage. No doubt to fetch her—Maria—to church, with a plausible plea of having been detained. Until now she had had no proof of his falsity; had never perfectly believed in it.

She took her arms from the trees and went forward, a sharp faint cry of despair breaking forth on the night-air. Maria Lease was one of those silent-natured girls who can never speak of a wrong like this. She had to bury it within her, down, down, out of sight and show; and she went into church with her usual quiet step. Harriet Roe with Miss Timmens came next, quite demure, as if she had been singing some of the infant scholars to sleep at their own homes. Daniel Ferrar did not go at all: he stayed, as was found afterwards, with Mrs. Lease. Maria might as well have been at home as at church: better perhaps that she had been. Not a syllable of the service did she hear: her brain was in a sea of confusion; a rising tumult getting higher and higher. She did not hear even the text, "Peace, be still," or the sermon, both so singularly appropriate. The passions in men's minds, the preacher said, raged and foamed just like the angry waves of the sea in a storm, until Jesus came to still them.

I ran after Maria when church was over, and went in to pay the promised visit to old Mother Lease. Daniel Ferrar was sitting in the parlour. He got up and offered Maria a chair at the fire, but she turned her back and stood at the table under the window, taking off her gloves. An open Bible was before Mrs. Lease: I wondered whether she had been reading aloud to Daniel Ferrar.

"What was the text, child?"

No answer.

"Do you hear, Maria? What was the text?"

Maria turned at that, as if suddenly awakened. Her face was white; her eyes had in them a certain terror.

"The text?" she stammered. "I—I forget it, mother. It was from Genesis, I think."

"Was it, Master Johnny?"

"It was from the fourth chapter of St. Mark, 'Peace, be still.'"

Mrs. Lease stared at me. "Why, that's the very chapter I've been reading. Well now, that's curious. But there's never a better in the Bible, and never a better text was took from it than them three words. I've been telling Daniel here, Master Johnny, that when once that peace, Christ's peace, is got into the heart, storms can't hurt us much. And you are going away again to-morrow, sir?" she added after a pause. "It's a short stay."

I was not going away on the morrow. Tod and I, taking the Squire in a genial moment after dinner, had pressed to be let stay until

Tuesday, Tod using the argument, and laughing while he did it, that it must be wrong to travel on All Saints' Day, when the parson had specially enjoined us to be at church. The Squire told us we were a couple of encroaching rascals, and if he did let us stay it should be upon condition that we went to church. This I said to them."

"He may send you all the same, sir, when the morning comes," remarked Daniel Ferrar.

"Knowing Mr. Todhetley as you do, Ferrar, you may remember that he never breaks his promises."

Daniel laughed. "He grumbles over them, though, Master Johnny."

"Well, he may grumble to-morrow over our staying, say it's wasting the time that ought to be spent in study, but he'll not send us back until Tuesday."

Until Tuesday! If I could have foreseen then what would have happened before Tuesday! If all of us could have foreseen! Seen the few hours between now and then depicted, as if in a mirror, event by event! Would it have saved the calamity, the dreadful sin that could never be redeemed? Why yes; surely it would. Daniel Ferrar turned round and looked at Maria.

"Why don't you come to the fire?"

"I'm very well here, thank you."

She had sat down where she was, her bonnet against the curtain. Mrs. Lease, not noticing that anything was amiss, had begun talking about Lena, whose illness was turning to low fever, when the house door opened and Harriet Roe came in.

"What a lovely night it is!" she said, taking, of her own accord, the chair I had not cared to take, for I kept saying I must go. "Maria, what went with you after church? I was hunting for you everywhere."

Maria gave no answer. She looked black and angry; and her chest heaved as if a storm were brewing. Harriet Roe slightly laughed.

"Do you to intend to make holiday to-morrow, Mrs. Lease?"

"Me make holiday! what is there in to-morrow to make holiday for?"

"I shall," continued Harriet, without answering the question; "I've been used to do it in France. All Saints' Day is a grand holiday there; we go to church in the best clothes we've got, and pay visits afterwards. Following it, like an ugly shadow, comes the gloomy jour des morts."

"The what?" cried Mrs. Lease, bending her ear.

"The day of the dead. All Souls' Day. But you English don't go to the cemeteries to pray."

Mrs. Lease put on her spectacles, which lay between the open pages of the Bible, and stared at Harriet. Perhaps she thought they might assist her to understand. The girl laughed.

"On All Souls' Day, whether it may be wet or dry, the French cemeteries are full of kneeling women, draped in black, praying for the repose of their dead relatives, after the manner of the Roman Catholics."

Daniel Ferrar, who had not spoken a word since she came in, but sat with his face in the fire, turned round and looked at her. Upon which she tossed back her head and her pink ribbons, and smiled till all her teeth were seen. Good teeth they were. As to reverence in her tone, there was none.

"I have seen them kneeling when the slosh and wet has been up to the ankles. Did you ever see a ghost?" added she, with energy. "The French believe that the spirits of the dead come abroad on the night of All Saints' Day. You'd scarcely get a French woman to go out of her house after dusk. It's their chief superstition of all."

"What *is* the superstition?"

"Why, *that*," said Harriet. "They believe that the dead are allowed to revisit the world, after dark, on the Eve of All Souls, and hover in the air; waiting to appear to any of their living relatives, who may venture out, lest they should forget to pray on the morrow for their souls' rest."*

"Well, I never!" cried Mrs. Lease, staring excessively. "Did you ever hear the like of that, sir?"

"Yes; I have heard of it."

Harriet Roe turned to me when I spoke; I was standing at the corner of the mantel-piece. She laughed a free laugh.

"I say, wouldn't it be fun to go out to-morrow night, and look for the ghosts? Only, perhaps they don't visit this country, it not being under Rome."

"Now just you behave yourself before your betters, Harriet Roe," put in Mrs. Lease. "That gentleman is young Mr. Ludlow, of Crabb Cot."

"And very happy I am to make young Mr. Ludlow's acquaintance," returned easy Harriet, flinging back her mantle from her shoulders. "How hot your parlour is, Mrs. Lease."

The fastening hook of the cloak had caught in a thin chain of twisted gold that she wore round her neck, pulling it out to view. She hurriedly folded her cloak together, as if wishing to conceal the chain. But Mrs. Lease's spectacles had seen it.

"What's that you've got on, Harriet? A gold chain?"

A moment's pause, and then Harriet Roe flung back her mantle again, a defiant look upon her face, and touched the chain with her hand.

"That's what it is, Mrs. Lease: a gold chain. And a very pretty one, too."

* The superstition obtains amidst some of the lower orders in France.—Ed.

"Was it your mother's?"

"It never was anybody's but mine. I had it made a present to me this afternoon; for a keepsake."

Happening to look at Maria, I was startled at her face, it was so white and yet so dark: white with emotion, dark with an angry despair that I for one did not comprehend. Harriet Roe, throwing over to her a look of saucy triumph, went out with as little ceremony as she had come in; and we heard her footsteps outside getting gradually further away in the distance. Daniel Ferrar rose.

"I'll take my departure too, I think. You are very unsocial to night, Maria."

"May be I am. May be I have cause to be."

She flung his hand back when he held it out; and in another minute, as if a thought struck her, ran after him into the passage to speak. I, standing near the door in the small room, caught the words.

"I must have an explanation with you, Daniel Ferrar. Now. To-night. We cannot go on thus for a single hour longer."

"Not to-night, Maria: there's no time. And I don't know what you mean."

"You do know. Listen. I'll not go to my rest, no, not though it were for twenty nights to come, until we have had it out. I *vow* I will not. There. You are playing with me. Others have long said so, and I know it now."

He seemed to speak some quieting words to her; for the tone was low and soothing, and then went out, shutting the door behind him. Maria came back and stood with her face and its ghastliness turned from view, her chest heaving like mad. And still the old mother noticed nothing.

"Why don't you take your things off, Maria?"

"Presently," was the answer.

I said good night and went away then. Half way home I met Tod with the two young Lexoms: they made us go in and stay to supper, and it was ten o'clock before we got away.

"We shall catch it," said Tod, setting off to run. They never let us stay out late on a Sunday evening, on account of the reading.

But, as it happened, we escaped scot-free this time, for the house was in a commotion about Lena. She had been better in the afternoon, but at nine o'clock the fever came back worse than ever. Her little cheeks and lips were scarlet as she lay on the bed, her wide-open eyes shone bright and glistening. The squire had gone up to look at her, and was fuming and fretting in his usual fashion.

"The doctor has never sent the medicine," said patient Mrs. Todhetley, who must have been worn out with nursing. "She ought to take it; I am sure she ought."

"These boys are good to run over for that," cried the Squire. "It won't hurt them; it's a fine night."

Of course we were good for it. And got our caps again, being charged to enjoin Mr. Cole to come over the first thing in the morning.

"Do you care much about my going with you, Johnny?" Tod asked as we were turning out at the door. "I'm awfully tired."

"Not a bit. I'd as soon go alone as in company. You'll see me back in half an hour."

I took the nearest way; flying across the fields at a canter, and startling the hares. Mr. Cole lived near South Crabb, and I don't believe more than ten minutes had gone by when I knocked at his door. But to get back as quickly was another thing. The doctor was not at home. He had been called out to a patient at eight o'clock, and was not back yet.

I went in to wait: the servant said he might be expected to come in from minute to minute. Of no use to go away without the medicine, and I sat down in the surgery in front of the shelves, and fell asleep counting the white jars and physic bottles. The doctor's entrance awoke me.

"I am sorry you should have had to come over and to wait," he said, "When my other patient, with whom I was detained a considerable time, was done with, I went on to Crabb Cot with the child's medicine, which I had in my pocket."

"They think her very ill to-night, sir."

"I left her better, and going quietly to sleep. She'll soon be well, I hope."

"Why! is that the time?" I exclaimed, happening to catch sight of the clock as I was crossing the hall. It was nearly twelve. Mr. Cole laughed, saying the time passed quickly when folks were asleep.

I went back slowly. The sleep, or the canter thither, had made me feel as tired as Tod said he was. It was a night to be abroad in and to enjoy; calm, warm, light. The moon, high in the blue sky, sent her rays on every individual blade of grass; they sparkled on the water of the little rivulet; they brought out the moss on the grey walls of the old church; they played on its round-faced clock, then striking twelve.

Twelve o'clock at night at North Crabb answers to about three in the morning in London, for country people are mostly abed and asleep at ten. Therefore, when loud and angry voices struck up in dispute, just as the last stroke of the hour was dying away on the midnight air, I stood still and didn't believe my ears.

I was close at home then. The sounds came from the back of a detached barn, or granary, for it was used as a store-house for corn, the front of which I had to pass. Round I went, and saw—Maria Lease: and something else that I could not at first comprehend. In the pur-

suit of her vow, not to go to rest until she had "had it out" with Daniel Farrer, she had come abroad searching for him. What ill fate brought her looking for him up by our barn?—perhaps because she had looked fruitlessly in every other spot.

At the back of this barn, up some steps, was an unused door. Unused partly because it was not required, the principal entrance being in front; partly because the key of it had been for a long while missing. Stealing out at this door, a bag of corn upon his shoulders, had come Daniel Ferrar in a smock-frock. Maria saw him, and stood back in the shade. She watched him lock the door and conceal the key in his pocket; she watched him give the heavy bag a jerk as he turned to come down the steps. Then she burst out. Her shrieking reproaches petrified him, and he stood there like one suddenly turned to stone.

I understood it all soon; it needed not Maria's words to enlighten me. Daniel Ferrar possessed the lost key and could come in and out at will in the midnight hours when the world was safe, and help himself to the corn. No wonder his poultry thrive; no wonder there had been grumblings at Crabb Cot at the mysterious disappearance of the good grain.

Maria Lease was decidedly mad in those few first moments. Stealing is looked upon in an honest village as an awful thing; a disgrace, a crime; and there was the night's previous misery besides. Daniel Ferrar was a thief! Daniel Ferrar was false to her! The storm of words and reproaches came forth in confusion, none very distinct. "Living upon theft! Convicted felon! Transportation for life! Mr. Todhetley's corn! Fattening poultry on stolen goods! Buying gold chains with the profits for that bold flaunting French girl, Harriet Roe! Taking his stealthy walks with her!"

My going up stopped the charge. There was a pause; and then Maria, in her mad passion, denounced him to me, as representative (it was how she put it) of Mr. Todhetley—the breaker in of our premises! the robber of our stored corn!

Daniel Ferrar came down the steps; he had remained there as a statue, immovable; and turned his white face to me. Never a word in defence said he: the blow had crushed him; he was a proud man (if anybody can understand that), and to be discovered in this ill-doing was worse than death.

"Don't think of me more hardly than you can help, Master Johnny," he said in a still tone. "I've been a'most tired of my life this long while."

Putting down the bag of corn by the steps, he took the key from his pocket and handed it to me. The man's aspect had so changed; there was something so grievously subdued and sad about him altogether, that I felt as sorry for him as if he had not been guilty. Maria Lease went on in her fierce passion.

"You'll be more tired of it to-morrow when the police are dragging you to Worcester gaol. Squire Todhetley will not spare you, though your father was his many-year bailiff. He couldn't, you know, if he wished; Master Ludlow has seen you in the act."

"Let me have the key again for a minute, sir," he said, as quietly as though he did not hear a word. And I gave it to him. I'm not sure but I should have given him my head had he asked for it.

He swung the bag on his shoulders, unlocked the granary door, and put the bag by the side of the other sacks. The bag was his own, as we found afterwards, but he left it. Locking the door again, he gave me the key, and went away with a weary step.

"Good-bye, Master Johnny."

I answered back a good-night civilly, though he had been stealing. When he was out of sight, Maria Lease, her passion full upon her still, dashed off towards her mother's cottage, a strange cry of despair once breaking from her.

"Where have you been lingering, Johnny?" roared the Squire, who was sitting up for me. "You've been throwing at the owls, sir, that's what you've been at; you've been scudding after the hares."

I said I had waited for Mr. Cole, and had come back slower than I went; but I said no more, and got up to my room at once. And the Squire went to his.

I know I'm only a muff; people tell me so, often: but I can't help it; I didn't make myself. I lay awake till nearly daylight, first wishing Daniel Ferrar could be screened, and then thinking it might perhaps be done. If he would only take the lesson to profit and go on straight for the future, what a capital thing it would be. We had liked old Ferrar; he did me and Tod many a good turn: and for the matter of that we liked Daniel. So I never said a word when morning came of the past night's work.

"Is Daniel at home?" I asked, going to Ferrar's the first thing before breakfast. I meant to tell him that if he'd keep right, I'd keep counsel.

"He went out at dawn, sir," answered the old woman, who did for him and sold his poultry at market. "He'll be in presently: he have had no breakfast yet."

"Then tell him, when he comes, to wait in and see me: tell him it's all right. Can you remember, Goody? 'It is all right.'"

"I'll remember, safe enough, Master Ludlow."

Tod and I, being on our honour, went to church, and found about ten people in the pews. Harriet Roe was one, with her pink ribbons, and the twisted gold chain hanging below a short-cut velvet jacket.

"No, sir; he has not been home yet; I can't think where he can have got to," was the old Goody's reply when I went again to Ferrar's.

And so I wrote just a word in pencil, and told her to give it him, when he came in, for I couldn't go dodging there every hour in the day.

After luncheon, in strolling along by the back of the barn, a certain reminiscence I suppose taking me there, for it was not a frequented spot, I saw Maria Lease coming past the three-cornered grove of trees lower down.

Well, it was a change ! The passionate woman of the previous night had subsided into a poor, wild-looking, sorrow-stricken thing, fit to die of remorse. The excessive passion had wrought its usual consequences; a reaction : a reaction in favour of Daniel Ferrar. She came up to me, clasping her hands in beseeching agony—that I would spare him; that I would not tell of him; that I would give him a chance for the future: and her lips quivered and trembled, and there were dark circles round her hollow eyes.

I said that I had not told and did not intend to tell. Upon which she was going to fall down on her knees with thanks, but I rushed off.

"Do you know where he is?" I asked, when she came to her sober senses.

"Oh, I wish I did know ! Master Johnny, he is just the man to go and do something desperate. He'd never face shame; and I was a mad, hard-hearted, wicked fool to do what I did last night. He might run away to sea; he might go and enlist for a soldier."

"I dare say he is at home by this time. I have left a word for him there, and promised to go in and see him to-night. If he'll undertake not to be up to wrong things again, nobody shall ever know of this from me."

She went away easier, and I sauntered on towards South Crabb. Eager as Tod and I had been for the day's holiday, it did not seem to be turning out much of a boon. In going home again; there was nothing worth staying out for; I had come to about the spot by the three-cornered grove where I saw Maria, when a galloping policeman overtook me. My heart stood still as well as my feet; for I thought he must have come after Daniel Ferrar.

"Can you tell me if I am near to Crabb Cot—Squire Todhetley's?" he asked, reining in his fast horse.

"You'll come to it in a minute. I live there. Squire Todhetley is not at home. What do you want with him?"

"It's only to give in an official paper, sir. I have got to leave one personally upon all the county magistrates."

He rode on. When I got in I saw the folded paper upon the hall-table; the man and horse had already gone onwards. It was worse indoors than out; less to be done; Tod had disappeared after church; the squire was abroad; Mrs. Todhetley sat upstairs with Lena: and I strolled out again. It was only three o'clock then.

An hour or more were got through somehow: meeting one, talking to another, throwing at the ducks and geese; anything. Mrs. Lease had her head (smothered in a yellow shawl) stretched out over the palings as I passed her cottage.

"Don't catch cold, mother."

"I am looking for Maria, sir. I can't think what has come to her to-day, Master Johnny," she added, dropping her voice to a confidential tone. "The girl seems demented: she has been going in and out since daylight like a dog in a fair."

"If I meet her I'll send her home."

And in another minute I did meet her. For she was coming out of Daniel Ferrar's yard. I supposed he was at home.

"No," she said, looking more wild, worn, haggard than before; "that's what I have been to ask. I am just out of my senses, sir. He is gone for certain. Gone!"

I didn't think it. He would not be likely to go away without clothes.

"Well, I know he is, Master Johnny; something tells it me. I've been all about everywhere. There's a great dread upon me, sir; I never felt anything like it."

"Wait until night, Maria; I dare say he'll go home then. Your mother is looking out for you; I said if I met you I'd send you in."

Mechanically she turned to the cottage, and I went on. Presently, as I was sitting on a gate watching the sunset, Harriet Roe passed towards the withy walk, and gave me a nod in her free but good-natured way.

"Are you going down there to look out for the ghosts this evening?" I asked; and I wished not long afterwards I had never said it. "It will soon be dusk."

"So it will," she said, turning to the red western sky. "But I have no time to give to the ghosts to-night."

"Have you seen Ferrar to-day?" I cried, an idea occurring to me.

"No. And I can't think where he has got to; unless he's off to Worcester. He told me he should have to go there some day this week."

She evidently knew nothing of him, and went on her way with another free-and-easy nod. I sat on the gate till the sun had gone down, and then thought it was time to be getting homewards.

Close against the store-house (the scene of the last night's trouble) who should I come upon but Maria Lease. She was standing still, and turned quickly at the sound of my footsteps. Her face was bright again, but had a puzzled look upon it.

"I have just seen him; he's not gone," she said in a glad whisper. "You were right, Master Johnny, and I was wrong."

"Where did you see him?"

"Here, not a minute ago. I saw him twice. He is angry, very, and will not let me speak to him; both times he got away before I could reach him. He is close by somewhere."

I looked round, naturally, but Ferrar was nowhere to be seen. There was nothing to hide him except the barn, and that was locked up. The account she gave was this,—and her face grew puzzled again as she related it.

Unable to rest indoors she had wandered up here again, and saw Ferrar standing at the corner of the barn, looking very hard at her. She thought he was waiting for her to come up, but before she got close he had gone, and she did not see which way. She hastened past the barn in front, went round the top to the back, and there he was. He stood near the steps, looking out for her, waiting for her, as it again seemed, and was gazing at her with the same fixed, hard stare. But again she missed him before she could get quite up; and it was at that moment that I appeared.

I ran round the barn, but could not see Ferrar. Inside the barn he could not be; it was securely locked; and there was no appearance of him in the open country. It was, so to say, broad daylight yet, or at least not far short of it; the red light was still in the western sky.

"Are you sure it was Ferrar, Maria?"

"Sure!" she returned in surprise at the doubt. "You don't think I could mistake him, Master Johnny, do you? He wore that ugly seal-skin winter-cap of his tied over the ears, and his thick grey coat was buttoned up."

That he had gone into hiding somewhere appeared quite evident. While we stared about, voices were heard in the direction of our house, and Maria, not caring to be seen, went away quickly. Tod, the Squire, and two or three men, came into view, quite a group of them.

"I say, Johnny, what a shocking thing this is! Have you heard of it?"

It was Tod who spoke. I had heard nothing; I did not know what there was to hear. And when he told me, I turned sick, taking one thing with another, which I dare say you'll think nobody but a muff would do.

Ferrar was dead. He had been hiding all day in the three-cornered grove: perhaps waiting for night to get away—perhaps only waiting for the night to go home again. Who can tell? About half-past two Luke Macintosh, a labourer, happening to go through the grove, had seen him there, and talked to him for a few minutes. The same man, passing through again a little before sunset, found him hanging to a tree, dead, and getting cold. Macintosh ran with the news to Crabb Cot, and they were now flocking to the scene. When facts came to be examined and notes compared, there appeared only too much reason to think that the unfortunate appearance of the galloping policeman

on the spot had terrified Ferrar into the act : perhaps—we all hoped it !—had scared his senses quite away. Look at it as we would, it was very dreadful.

But what of the appearance Maria Lease saw ? Was it reality or delusion ? That is (as the Squire put it), did her eyes see a real, spectral Daniel Ferrar, or were they deceived by some imagination of the brain ? Opinions were divided. Nothing can shake her own steadfast belief in its reality ; to her it remains an awful certainty, true and sure as heaven.

If I say that I believe in it too, I shall be called a muff and a double muff. But there's one stumbling-block difficult to get over. Ferrar, when found, was wearing the seal-skin cap tied over the ears and the thick gray coat buttoned up round him, just as Maria Lease described them to me ; and he had never put them on since the previous winter, or got them out of the chest where they were kept. The old woman at his home did not know he had done it then.

JOHNNY LUDLOW.



DYING.

“GOOD night, my darling ; shadows dim are lying
Along the woods, and far across the hills
The daylight dieth, even as thou art dying,
And bitter loneliness my poor life fills.
Oh, darling, I have watched thee fading, fading,
As fadeth now the light.
Before the morning glow the east is shading
It will be over. Oh, my own, good night !”

“Kiss me good-morning, bid me not good-night ;
I know the shadows of the earthly night are falling.
But I perceive no shadow in the light
Of the wide-open gates ;—angels are calling—
I hear them, see them gather in my room,
I know that the Eternal day is dawning,
Passing for ever from the mist and gloom :
Say not good-night—bid me a glad good-morning.”

E. L. L.

OLDEN TIMES.

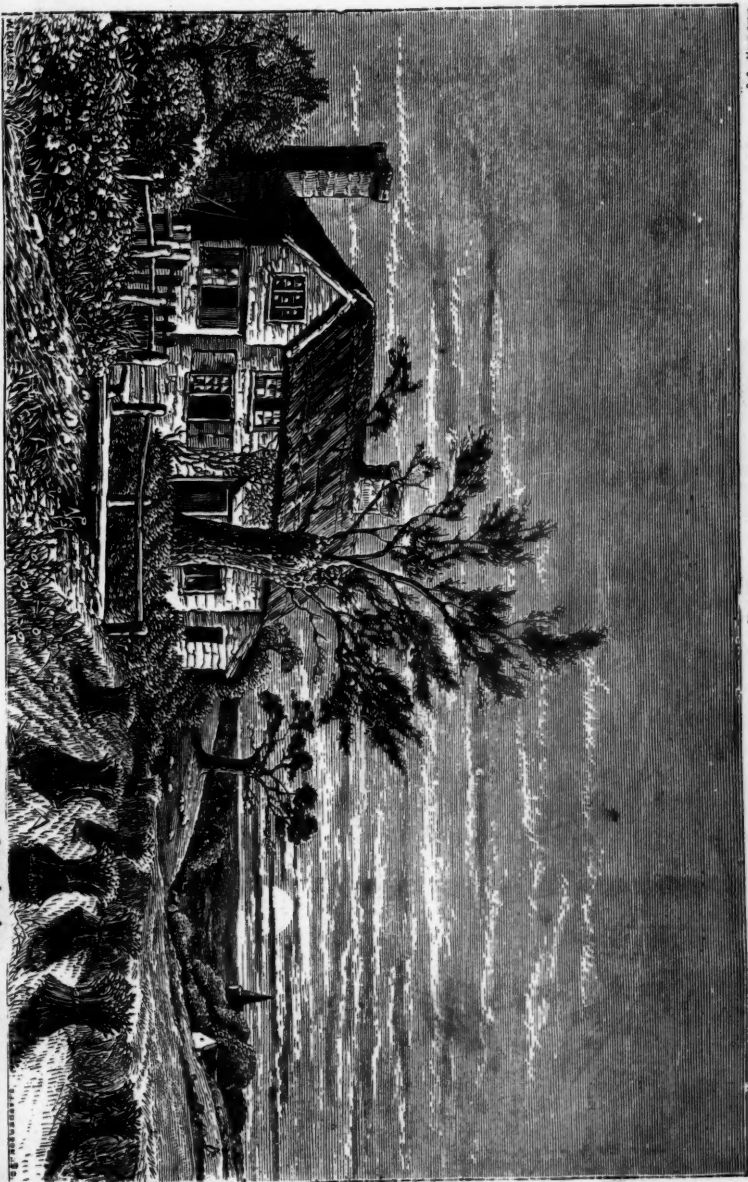
AWAY in the summer olden,
The wheaten sheaves, all golden,
Glimmered, shimmered in the setting sun ;
The rose and morning glory,
Climbing to the upper story
Of the old house, met and mingled into one.

Though many scenes were rarer,
Oh, nothing could be fairer
Than to watch, until the day grew wan and gray,
The aged oak-tree shadows
Lengthen o'er the fragrant meadows,
Where the daisies kissed the violets in May.

I hear the low bees humming,
And the merry beetle thrumming,
Mid the blossoms of an orchard to the right.
Down a hill a brooklet dashes,
'Neath a rustic bridge, and flashes
Out its ripples in the sunlight warm and bright.
O'er these scenes our heart will linger
Until Time's relentless finger
Breaks the choicest links in memory's chain.
Praying so wildly ever,
For what is ours—ah, never !
The perfect life without a spot or stain.

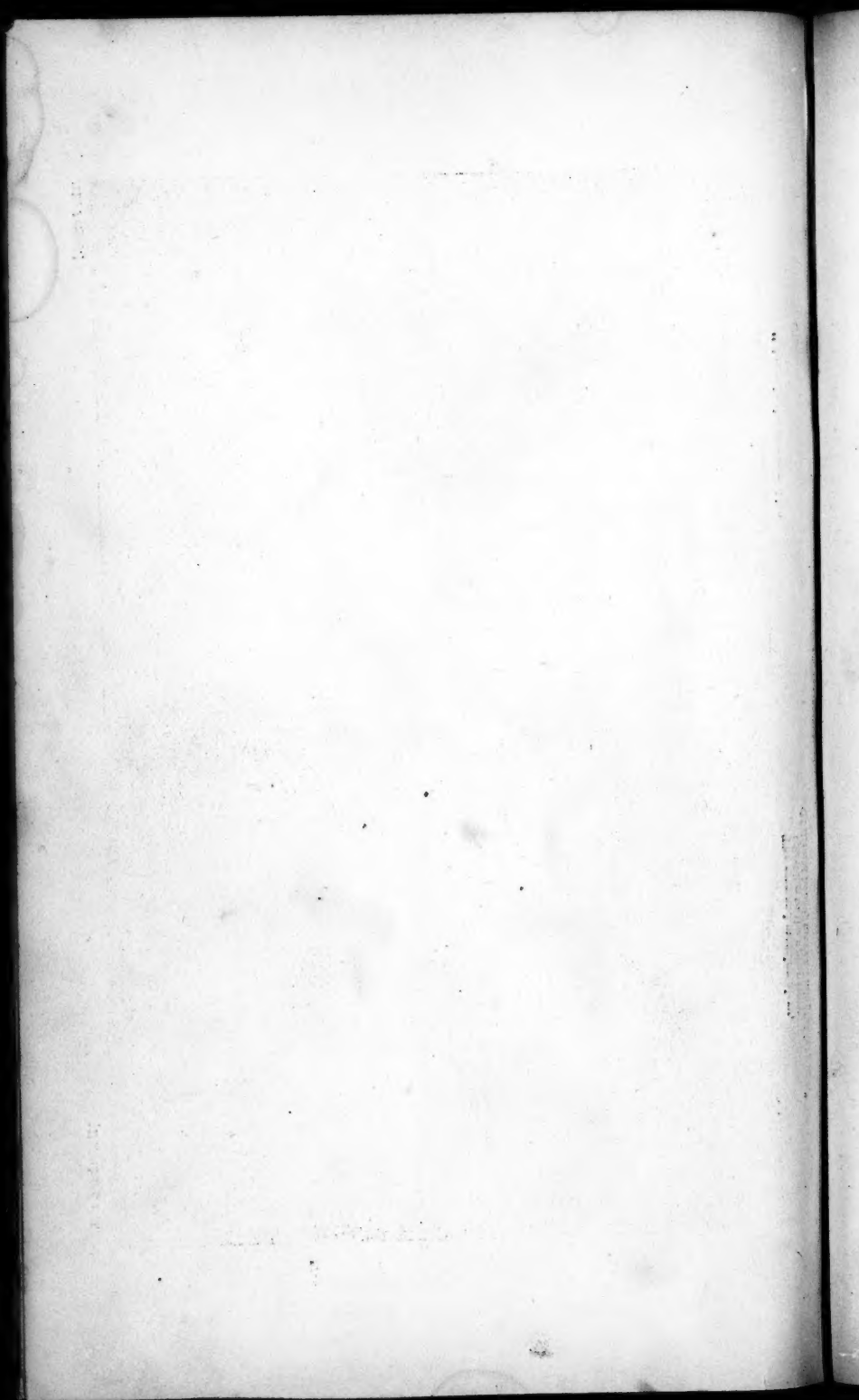
"Away in the summer olden,
The wheaten sheaves, all golden,
Glimmered, shimmered in the setting sun ;

"Climbing to the upper story
Of the old house, met and mingled into one."



"Away in the summer-eld, /
The wheaten sheaves, all golden,
Glimmered, shimmered in the setting sun :

The rose and morning glory,
Blushing, blushing, all the day,
Of the old house, met and mingled into one."



BURIED ALONE.

BY A NEW WRITER.

CHAPTER X.

LAST MOMENTS.

LORD MASSERON was failing rapidly. He appeared to have no longer any object to live for. Whether, had his sister not been found, the anxiety to discover her would really have prolonged his life, can never be known. It might have done so for a time, possibly, but for a time only. The effect of the mind upon the body is, as we daily see around us, so marvellous and incomprehensible, the affinity each has with the other so subtle, that it is almost impossible to overrate its influence; and none can tell what that influence might have been on Lord Masseron. It has been said that a man cannot die with any great, yearning, passionate wish upon his soul: that it must be fulfilled in some shape or other, or else crushed, before the restlessness can subside and the end can come. Let that pass. In Lord Masseron's case the longing was over; the wish to discover his sister, which had even at once begun to bring in its train the attendant feverish restlessness, was accomplished—almost as soon as born: and he felt that his hours were numbered.

We will not dwell upon the feelings of Lord and Lady Haredale when at length their lost child was restored to them. None can imagine them in their fullest extent. Not brighter, purer, in any way better could his daughter have been had she never left her mother's side. What the Earl thought of Jean Martin's letter (to call him by the name he had adopted) it did not please him to disclose to mortal man or woman—as of course was only natural. When William Rayner handed it to him, explaining how he had chanced to read it (in the excitement of discovery), and apologized for having done so, the Earl glanced over the few first lines and then crushed it into his pocket for future perusal.

No matter. In the rapture of finding his idolized and long-lost child, of seeing her what she was, the Earl did not dwell on petty annoyances. Jean Martin, though he did take his bitter revenge, was not altogether bad, or Lucy had not been what she was. They, the father and mother, were almost jealous of each other in usurping the society of Lucy; but Lord Masseron got the most of her. It was a kind of rapture on earth, and nothing less. There were so many con-

fidences to be exchanged : Lucy had to tell of her life ; Lady Haredale related all about home in old England, what had transpired during the lapsed years ; seeking, both of them, to link together the chain which had been for so long rent asunder.

And so a short while went on. But as calmness supervened on the excitement, tranquil satisfaction upon the tumultuous joy, Lord Masseron's strength gradually waned and faded,—almost imperceptibly to himself, as well as to others : until one morning arose when a still small voice whispered to him that the last hour was close at hand.

He lay on a sofa in his room, placed before the open window. The view from it was beautiful ; a still, lovely scene ; such a one as you would fancy must give pleasure to dying eyes to rest upon. Lord Masseron's were on it. The calm, bright bay, blue and beautiful, on which the gondolas lazily glided, was sparkling in the sunshine ; the trees were still and motionless ; the hills stretched themselves aloft in links of majesty and grandeur, their summits appearing almost as distant as the far-off land to which the spirit was about to take its flight. Away, nearly at the limit of sight, reposed a single vapoury, white cloud, in the blue canopy of heaven, like an opal stone in a setting of turquoise : to Lord Masseron it seemed almost beautiful enough to be the car of approaching angels. If anything earthly can afford delight to one dying, it must surely be a fair and grand scene of nature.

Near Lord Masseron sat Lady Haredale and Lucy. Rayner was also in the room, but at this moment in a distant part of it. Lord Haredale had just gone out, hoping to get relief to his feelings by a few moments of solitude and self-communing. The hard man had become softened : it was almost death to him to see his son die. They could all have enjoyed together now so much happiness on earth !

The invalid was busy with his own thoughts. Before sunset his life would, in all probability, have passed away ; his soul have winged its flight to Eternity. The world was over for him. As his life had been spent, so it must remain ; he could not recall it or live it over again, and he was feeling infinitely thankful that in his last hour he could look back upon it so calmly. The poor body was worn out, and he felt a strange longing to be at rest ; a longing that none but those who have lived out a protracted, wearying illness, whether of body or mind, can imagine. His physical strength had altogether gone from him, and had given place to that religious ecstasy which fills the heart of all men dying the death of the righteous. His life had been singularly pure. From his earliest years, owing partly to his mother's training, partly to the natural bias of his mind, religion had possessed charms and attractions for him which had increased and ripened with the growth of his intellect. At times a presentiment had whispered to him that his life would not be a long one, and it had but helped him to reject the evil and choose the good.

"Lucy," he suddenly said, after a long silence, "why are you crying?"

She had done her best to control her grief, but for a little while the tears would not be held back.

"Tell me what you are crying for?" he repeated, finding that she made no reply.

"Because I am no sooner restored to you, than you are being taken away," she answered. "It seems cruel."

"Not cruel at all. Is it not better thus, Lucy, than if they had found you after my death? Think how much happier it has made me."

"True. But why should you die at all, George? You are so young. Death might have spared you."

"Hush," he gravely returned. "We have no right to say that; knowing that all must be, and is, for the best. I am content to die, and not only content, but glad. My one regret is to leave you all. As far as the world goes, I do not care for it. I am about to enter into perfect happiness, and that is what the most fortunate lot here does not enjoy not even yours, Lucy, that is to be. And now let me be at rest with regard to this point. I want to know when you are going to be married."

"Oh, George! Never mind that now. I cannot think of it. I don't know."

"But I do mind. I want to have it decided. Mother," he said, appealing to Lady Haredale, "let this question be answered. William, come here."

"Do you want me?" asked Rayner, putting down what was just then concerning him, and coming forward. He had not heard Lord Masseron's remark.

"I wish the time for your marriage to be fixed. According to the custom of the world, I know it would be usual to wait a year or so after my death, and that is just what I want you not to do. Why should you? You will think of me together, quite as much as if you were apart; perhaps more. I am not afraid of being forgotten. Mother, how long after I am gone shall you stay in Italy?"

"Not long," replied Lady Haredale, who could scarcely speak from long-suppressed emotion. "Not any time. We shall return home immediately. I could not stay here."

"Then let them be married within two months after your arrival in England. Rayner, I know you have no objection to offer. Have you, Lucy?"

She blushed in spite of the trouble she was in, but she would not say yes.

"I cannot tell," she replied. "I cannot think of it just now. George, why do you persist in saying this? Is it not enough that we shall be married sometime?"

"No. Surely you will grant me this last wish?"

"I think," said Lady Haredale, who saw that Lucy really could not answer, "the question had better be referred to me. If you are very anxious for them to be married soon, we will agree that the wedding shall take place within three months after our return home. If they have no objection to this arrangement, I have none. They can be married very quietly, and in private."

"Then I shall consider it settled," he replied. "Let me see you shake hands, as a pledge that you will obey me."

Lucy coloured up to the roots of her hair as she gave her hand to Rayner. He grasped it with a sad smile, for his happiness was dulled by the thought that when indeed it became his, his friend would not be there.

"George," he whispered, bending over him, "I thank you from my very heart. I will love and cherish her as God's gift. It shall be my life's aim to shield her from harm; for her sake and my own,—and for yours, old friend, who give her to me so willingly. But we know each other so well that I need not say this."

"Indeed, yes. She is yours in all trust. I am *glad* to give her to you."

His voice failed him, for he could speak only with difficulty. Rayner held a glass to his lips, and the slight draught seemed to revive him. He remained in thought for some time, looking on the beautiful scene beyond the windows. He was weary in body; existence was suspended; the whole human machinery had run itself out; the soul was about to be loosened from its bonds; the bright light would soon fade from the eyes,—as quietly as the summer twilight fades into night, and all grows still.

"Mother," he presently said, "I must be buried somewhere. In Italy?"

"In England," she answered, struggling with ill-suppressed emotion.

"No, no. Let me be buried here. It will be a great and needless trouble to take me to England. I shall rest just as quietly here as there."

"George, do not talk so; I cannot bear it," she cried, with a burst of grief. "If you were buried here I could not rest; assuredly I should never go back home. You must lie at Haredale, where I can come and look at the spot every day, and seem to hold converse with you, and grow familiar with the place where I too shall lie some time."

"That is well, then," he answered, with a relieved sigh, as if satisfied; "I was only thinking of the trouble it might be to you and my father. But now—I should not like to lie in the vault. Bear with me, mother, while I talk of this: it is rather on my mind. I would like to lie, with the blue sky above me, under the green trees. Would you mind if it were not in the church or churchyard?"

"Oh, my son! Anything you best like shall be done."

"Rayner knows, then," said Lord Masseron, turning his eyes upon him. "You have not forgotten, have you, William?"

A remembrance flashed over William Rayner of the morning (characterized afterwards by sad events) when they had rode forth together from Haredale, and of Lord Masseron's singular fancy, its avowal and injunction to himself, as to a burial-place.

"I have not forgotten," he answered. "I remember all."

"Then you'll see my wish carried out?"

Rayner nodded. Lady Haredale, in spite of her grief, evinced some curiosity.

"You will be quite satisfied, mother. The dell is rendered almost sacred by its very beauty; and it is so secluded that scarcely anyone thinks of going near it. It will be all your own."

"But is it in a churchyard?—in consecrated ground?"

"I think the ground has been consecrated. You can readily ascertain that. If not, it can be done. Mother, dear, it will be all right."

"Tell me where it is," she urged.

A word or two sufficed; a faint smile crossed Lord Masseron's lips at his mother's look of surprise.

"It was my favourite spot," he said, "from the time when I, a little fellow of four, went on a visit to Haredale; it would be my favourite always if I lived to be old. I have spent hours and hours under the great weeping elm-tree, lying idly upon the grass; sometimes reading, sometimes watching the clouds as they floated along, and turning them in fancy into all sorts of shapes and devices. I liked it partly because it was so retired; the very hares would run up and look at me, and then come closer and make friends. What future visions,—some glorious, some sombre,—have I not pictured to myself lying there! and now and again the fancy passed through my mind that, if I were to die young, I should like to be buried there. A foolish fancy, I dare say, but a harmless one: at any rate it is to be realized. William, you and Lucy will sometimes come together and look at my grave, and talk about me, and of these bygone days. Now that they are over, I can see how happy they have been. They could only have been happier if I had always had my little sister to love and protect," he added, fondly stroking Lucy's hair.

Poor Lucy! He was trying her very terribly. They would not give way to their grief; but it was all difficult to bear.

The day went on to the afternoon, Lord Masseron growing nearer and nearer to death. There could be no longer any hope about the matter,—any mistake: the day was not nearer its end than he was. The clergyman had been there; the Holy Sacrament administered; peace reigned. For a short while after the departure of the minister, he had been left alone at his own request.

When they returned to the room, he lay on the couch still. His eyes were closed, but the expression of his countenance was calm and happy, almost rapturous. Already he was beginning to realize the glories awaiting him in the world whose threshold he was crossing. Hearing them, he opened his eyes and smiled without speaking. Lady Haredale thought he was dying, and began anxiously to listen for her husband's step, who had again absented himself. She seated herself by him and took his hand. He pressed it slightly, and gave her a look such as none but a son can give a mother. It expressed all he could no longer speak. Love, deep and eternal; gratitude for all the goodness and loving-kindness she had exercised towards him. "I am going," he whispered. "But yonder, beyond the skies, I shall be waiting for you, mother; perhaps be watching over you until your hour too has drawn near. Lucy, remember that there is only one way by which you can ensure happiness, here and hereafter. I do not fear for you or for William either; but you must both watch—over yourselves and over each other."

He paused a moment, for his breath was almost gone. Then he asked his mother to read to him, and she opened the Bible at the last chapter of the Revelations.

"And he shewed me a pure river of the water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding out of the throne of God and of the Lamb.

"And let him that is athirst come, and whosoever will, let him take of the water of life freely.

"Surely I come quickly. Amen."

As the chapter concluded he strained his eyes into the distance, and his face suddenly became almost glorified in expression. "At last!" he murmured. "There! there! I see——" Speech failed him, and he could not conclude the sentence. He pointed towards the sky, as though some magnificent scene had been opened to him, and with that last intense look, fell back and was motionless.

Lady Haredale closed the book, and saw that the great change had taken place. She glided from her seat and fell forward, with her head upon the remains of her much-loved son: and gave way in agony to the long pent-up grief which would be restrained no longer.

CHAPTER XI.

COMING HOME.

It is doubtful if M. Weber had not been the one most affected by the sudden changes of the last few weeks. The surprise with which he had received Lucy's history was not unmixed with a certain feeling of unpleasantness and regret. The regret, indeed, was decided and intense, for many reasons. He had learned to love his pupil with an affection which he himself felt was fast outstripping the confines of prudence.

And yet he could not help himself; their occupations inevitably threw them much together and alone, for it is impossible to work in the presence of a third person. It was a danger he had not dreaded or even glanced at; he had thought himself for years past proof against all such temptations. But he discovered his mistake; and, when he came to ponder well the matter, it is not to be wondered that he found many things by which he excused himself to his own conscience. It was no small matter of regret to him that Lucy's career must terminate even before it had begun. He had watched her progress with delight; he had expected great things from her, which undoubtedly would have been realized had she become a singer: and to find it all at once put an end to was deeply mortifying. It was an event he had never anticipated.

The chief pleasure of his daily occupations was gone, and he wondered how he would possibly exist without it. But for Lucy's sake he rejoiced in the change; rejoiced, that is, when he was told of her engagement to William Rayner. He felt convinced she would never consent to become any man's wife without first feeling sure that she was not making a mistake; and he felt also a strong suspicion, that no matter how much she had loved him she would not have consented to become his wife could she have pursued her profession. He had a vast insight into human nature; a power of analysing motives, which generally enabled him to draw just conclusions: he knew Lucy's conscientiousness; that, but for the discovery of her parentage, Rayner, nay, he himself, would have had great trouble in overcoming her scruples. Therefore he was glad for her sake; the great director was large-hearted, noble and generous; unselfish in every thought. He felt that what he might have hoped for never could have become a reality; mind-trouble and heart-dissatisfaction could but have come of it for him: and he knew that she was giving up her life's pursuit for a destiny far more suited to her, in which she would be far happier. All was for the best.

It was the day previous to their departure from Naples. The family—what remained of it—were assembled in the drawing-room, and M. Weber was with them. At this moment he was standing apart with Lord Haredale, and the two were in deep conversation. Lord Haredale was speaking.

"I thank you, once more and for ever, M. Weber, for your extreme kindness and attention to my daughter; for your care and protection of her when you thought her poor and friendless. It will be one of my greatest privileges to esteem you as a friend. I wish I could prove to you by any means in my power how greatly I feel my debt: that you would permit me to do so."

M. Weber bowed.

"You over-estimate the obligation, Lord Haredale. In the first

place, I will defy any one not to have done their utmost to befriend your daughter as long as they considered her in need of a protector. For the rest, I can only say that my intercourse with her has been the greatest pleasure of my later years. Her brightness and freshness have fastened themselves upon me, and I almost feel young again. How I shall get on without my pupil I cannot tell; I have watched her progress so long; for so long have hoped for and anticipated the day when she would startle the world, that I cannot yet bring myself to regard with pleasure the having had to resign her into your keeping."

"I do not wonder at it," returned Lord Haredale. "Unfortunately, you are scarcely resigning her into *my* keeping," he added, with a sad smile. "I do not really feel that she is mine, for you see, even before she was restored to me, she had given herself away to some one else."

"We cannot, of course, control events," answered M. Weber. "It is but a link in a wonderful chain; and, pardon me, my lord, it is the link of all others that most reconciles me to my own loss. I see now that frequent intercourse must have caused her to think highly of Mr. Rayner, and that if nothing had come of it, she yet would never have been happy in her profession. I can see it distinctly, and trace back many small circumstances which confirm me in my idea. You see I have known her intimately for some time, and have become thoroughly acquainted with her nature."

"More so than I ever shall," returned Lord Haredale, almost moodily. "I can feel that we shall never be to each other as father and daughter. I cannot wonder at it. That kind of love she must have buried with the dead."

"Do not despair," returned M. Weber. "It cannot come to you all at once, as it seems to have come to her mother. Your very nature forbids it. You are stern and undemonstrative, my lord—pardon me for saying it—together different from the few men with whom her life has been passed. M. Martin—as I hear—was cold, but never stern. In time, when she has become familiar with the idea; when she has grown to know you; when she can say to herself, 'That is my father,' without a feeling of strangeness and alienation, then she will love you. I know she respects you, and that is one great step towards it."

Lord Haredale sighed. He did not feel comfortable. He was revealing a little more of his inner nature and thoughts than was usual to him. This strange man, who possessed so much influence over every one with whom he came into contact, was throwing his spell over him. Strong man though the Earl was; cold and distant and forbidding as people generally found him, he felt that Weber possessed a power of attraction against which he could not contend. To him he would speedily have become open and candid; have confided to him all the secrets of his life. It was certainly marvellous the influence that Weber exercised over his fellow-men; he was himself only half con-

scious of it. He knew that his nature was stronger than that of most men, his feelings more intense, his will predominant; he felt that his mind was of a higher order; that in judging men by his own rule and standard, they were nowhere; that intellectually he seldom entered into the presence of his equal; and therefore, whilst only half realizing the extent of his influence, he was not surprised at it. He did not care for it; it did not come from his own seeking; but as far as he was able he made the best use of it.

"What would you have?" he continued. "I fear, an impossibility. I sympathise with you from my heart. I can imagine what it would be to possess such a child but in part. And even that should make you supremely rich. It is enough to have her and to know that she is certainly your own. Leave the rest to time."

"There is one thing I wish to say to you," said Lord Haredale. "But it is a delicate subject, M. Weber, and I scarcely like to approach it. I was on the point of doing so once, and something I saw, or fancied, in your manner, startled it away. Should I offend you, pardon me."

He paused as if for permission. M. Weber did not speak, but a flush began to steal over his brow. The Earl went on.

"I am aware that you have been at a very great expense in preparing my daughter for the profession to which she was destined. I am also aware that in withdrawing herself at the eleventh hour from that profession it must be to you the sacrifice of a large sum. I am very anxious to make this good to you. You know that I am rich. Name any sum, any recompense you please, and however large it may be, it shall be yours. But believe me, the extent of my fortune could never wipe out our debt of gratitude."

In spite of the delicate and kindly manner in which it was done, Weber felt the flush on his face deepen with pain. For which, though he could not stifle it, he blamed himself.

"No, no," he replied, hurriedly, "I could not—I could not. Your offer is very generous, my lord, very kind; I thoroughly appreciate it; but I cannot avail myself of it. If I were to accept payment for the little I have done for your daughter, it would destroy the romance and pleasure of our intercourse; it would become a matter of business instead of what it has been—a labour of love. Do not look upon me as a mere business man; one of that multitude whose aim and end in life is to amass money; who make their calling subservient to that aim, without a higher object beyond. I love my profession because I love music, and that makes it my greatest reward. But, to prove to you that I really appreciate your motive, we will make a compromise. I am willing to receive the actual expense I have incurred, what I have laid out in hard cash; neither more nor less. This will not be so unpleasant to me, and I dare say will put you far more at ease."

"I am sure you are sincere in all you say," replied Lord Haredale. "Believe me, the common-place motive of reward was never farther from my thoughts; but the idea of your losing your legitimate right—that for which you have worked—is far from agreeable to me. I am sorry I cannot prevail upon you—but we will allow the subject to rest as you have settled it," he hastily added, marking for the first time the flush in Weber's face. "Will you at any rate do me the favour to wear this in remembrance of her—of us all? You will look at it now and then as time goes on, and think of these bygone days, when perhaps some of us now present will be here no longer."

As he spoke he drew from his finger a costly diamond ring, and offered it to M. Weber.

"It is almost an heirloom in the family," he continued. "I have constantly worn it for twenty years. There are few stones like it. I value it as much as I can value such things, and for that reason shall feel proud and gratified by your keeping it."

It was gracefully offered, and Weber could but take it.

"You cannot feel greater pride in giving it, than I in accepting it, Lord Haredale," he answered. "Although I have hitherto forsworn all such personal ornaments, I will for the future wear this. And yet, believe me, my memory will never require artificial help."

He moved towards Lucy as he spoke, who was standing alone at a distant window, looking out upon the bay. Her face was pale and sad, but she smiled as he approached her.

"My master! are we indeed together for the last time? Is this our farewell?"

"It must be. What shall I do when you are gone?"

"As you did before I came to you. And yet—not quite that."

"Scarcely. Could you be the same as the Lucie of old if you felt bound to separate yourself from Mr. Rayner?"

Her eyes went out into the far distance, but she did not answer. It was not necessary.

"I trust your life has not been unhappy with us," said Weber. "At least you will carry away some pleasing recollections in the remembrance of many hours of study, which I believe were a delight to both of us. Do you think I shall want help whereby to remember you? Your father has supplied it."

He held up the ring to her, but a sudden thought seemed to strike her with pain.

"I hope—I trust my father—did not——"

She hesitated, and Weber answered the unfinished sentence.

"No. I did not understand that I was in any way receiving a reward. Your father rather made me feel that I was conferring an obligation by taking it. A great obligation, indeed! Was I not presumptuous?"

Lucy smiled.

"If, indeed, you were to be rewarded," she said, "it would leave us very poor. Even now I feel at times that I am guilty of base ingratitude by my conduct towards you."

"You cannot help yourself," he returned. "Will you be the first to put this ring on my finger?"

She took the ring and slipped it on to the little finger of his left hand.

"As long as this stone preserves its brightness, so long shall I remember you," she said.

"Then it will be for ever. And as long as this ring remains mine, so long I trust will our friendship last. But our paths from to-night lie far asunder. Rank, distance, wealth, everything will place a gulf between us. You are Lady Lucy Masseron now."

Lucy laughed. That place a gulf between them! M. Weber caught the look, saw how it was, and laughed too. Reared as she had been, she certainly did not appreciate her position as some would have done.

"I trust you will prove yourself our true friend by making many visits to us in England, M. Weber."

"I will at any rate pay you one visit after you are married, Lucy; that I may be able to picture you in your English home, and discover whether you are really happier than you would have been as the renowned prima donna, Lucie Martin. I do regret—I cannot but mourn that so much genius has been lost to the world."

"But the world knows it not, therefore it will not grieve. For myself I have earned the praise I should most have cared for, no matter where I had gone—the praise of the best and kindest of masters."

"What will our old friend Hermann say to all this?" remarked M. Weber. "Will he be glad or regretful?"

"And his good sister Pauline? She has some of my old home relics still. I have written all to them, M. Weber."

"And I have written nothing."

The strange tone of pain seemed to say that his heart had failed him, and Lucy glanced up. But time was drawing on.

"Will you keep these for my sake, Lucy, as a slight memento of your old life?"

He placed in her hands three small but exquisite miniature paintings. One was a representation of the interior of the French Cathedral in which she had sung as a girl; the second was a painting of the Bay of Naples, exactly as it now lay before them; and the third was a portrait of himself.

"I have had that one for some years," he said, pointing to the cathedral; "the Bay I have painted myself on purpose for you; my mother has had the likeness by her some little time, and it is she who now offers it to you."

"They are all exquisite," exclaimed Lucy, in delight. "I did not know you added this accomplishment to your knowledge of Art. You are a universal genius, M. Weber."

"Not so," he returned. "My one great gift was music; in all other things I have but dabbled. I have indeed brought nothing to perfection. All my most cherished hopes and plans have faded from me one by one; and you, my latest but not my least hope, have failed me more cruelly than all. But I am quite willing that it should be so. As the years go on, should we both live, do not forget me; and remember that not in the wide world will you possess a truer, better friend than Karl Weber. Farewell, Lucy."

A few minutes more and he had left the room. No one guessed the sorrow lurking within him, the change that had come over his life; not even Lucy. But as time went on it would soften into a sweet and glowing recollection, from which all sadness would have departed.

In another hour the Haredales, in their deep mourning, had left Naples. A once great treasure, cold and dead now, had gone out of the house before. Their journey to England was made as rapidly as possible. Lady Haredale wished to be at home, for many reasons. Once there, she promised herself she would never leave it again.

As they drove up the long avenue, Lucy looked out, for she was curious to see what her future home was like. She could not see it in perfection; the day was bright but cold; the trees were bare; all was very different from the home she had just left. Still, though she felt strange, she was not unhappy. Sad, of course, they all were.

"Welcome home, Lucy," said her mother, leading her into the western drawing-room. But as Lady Haredale looked around she could scarcely speak. Everything was just in the order they had left it; every chair, every book, seemed to speak to her of her lost son; there stood the piano, where he had so often sat to delight them; it had given forth its sweetest music at his touch; the hand that had "wak'd to ecstasy the living lyre" was at rest. "Welcome home, Lucy. I now feel that you have indeed been restored to me. Would that you had never left us!"

"I will make up for it mamma. Mine has indeed been an eventful life; far more so than it would have been had you never lost me. I shall probably appreciate my home all the better. It is a lovely place."

"And will be your residence for life, Lucy, and your children's after you. That is settled with Mr. Rayner. Your father could not bear for it to go to a stranger."

Lucy looked surprised. "Is it not entailed? Does it not go with the title?"

"It is not entailed: it was purchased but a few years ago. As to

the title," she added, in a voice of pain, "it has died with George. Your father has no heir now : with him it will become extinct."

"And we are to live here?"

Lucy sighed. She did not much understand these things. She was only conscious of a very great happiness and an intense sorrow : the one lying in William Rayner, the other in Lord Masseron's death.

"You will show me about the house, mamma. I do not know it yet."

"Yes, I will show you everything ; all its nooks and corners. You shall see first the chapel you will be married in. I will take you to it now."

She caught her daughter's hand as she spoke, and commenced a pilgrimage through various rooms and passages to the west end of the house. Ah, what pleasure all this would have been to the mother, but for her great loss ! How often must delight be attended by pain ! They crossed the ground that separated the house from the chapel ; Lady Haredale touched the spring of the small side door, and they passed in. Lucy was the first to start back, her mother next : the chapel was hung with sombre, dismal black.

"For the moment I had forgotten," said Lady Haredale, recovering herself. "It is in preparation for the funeral, the day after to-morrow ; part of the service will be read here. To-morrow the Bishop comes to consecrate the ground. Oh, George, George ! to bring you back thus !"

They sat together that evening with William Rayner in the western drawing-room, talking cheerfully, the topic just then being Lucy's restoration.

"It is a fortunate thing," Lady Haredale was saying, "that we went to Italy. William, we are indebted to you in this matter for falling in love with Lucy."

"A happy thought," replied Rayner. "But I do not think there is much credit due to me, for I simply could not help myself. I wonder you are willing to give her up to me so soon."

"There was the promise to George," answered Lady Haredale. "Besides, we shall not lose her. If you were going to emigrate it would be another affair. You are worthy of each other, William. She will make you a better wife than another would have made."

The remark surprised Rayner. It was the first time Lady Haredale had in that way alluded to Caroline Bosanquet. He now knew that if she did not know all—and all she could not know—she at any rate guessed a great deal. He felt sorry, but he was persuaded it would not go further. The subject was never again mentioned between them : and indeed Lady Haredale had alluded to it inadvertently.

"Lucy," said her mother, "I wish you would sing something. You know some of Handel's music?"

"Almost all, and by heart," replied Lucy. "I never forget what I have once learned."

She went to the piano, and after striking a few notes, commenced "I know that my Redeemer liveth."

Twilight was fast giving place to darkness. The room was very still. As she sang the pure melody in her wondrous and exquisite voice, a sort of tranquil rest fell upon the hearts of her father and mother. The words were very applicable just now. As they took in their full sense, they became more reconciled to their sorrow than they had yet felt. Lucy ceased; the room became quite quiet, and yet no one spoke to disturb its stillness.

CHAPTER XII.

AT THE GRAVE.

Two years passed on. It was an evening glorious as that on which we first saw Haredale. A small group, consisting of four persons, were seated on the grass, near one of the large fountains. Midsummer had passed; the weather was hot and sultry, the trees were thick with foliage and alive with the noisy song of birds. Seated with his back to the fountain was William Rayner: near him Lucy; opposite them, talking first to one then the other, was Karl Weber, who was just now fulfilling his promise to his old pupil. At this moment he held in his arms a child not yet a year old. Lucy was gazing fondly at it, trying to trace in it some likeness to her husband. But she could not manage it; they had called the boy George, and he most certainly resembled his namesake more than any one else. The same large, deep eyes; the same well-formed head; a promise of the same disposition—like him in all but delicacy of body. As far as it was possible to foresee this child would grow up strong and stalwart: he was a sturdy gentleman with fat legs now. M. Weber opened his mouth to speak, and the little fist was immediately thrust—we know not how far out of sight. When possession was recovered M. Weber looked as if he had had a narrow escape. Lucy laughed.

"Do you know of what this place reminds me?" he said, as soon as he found the siege had been raised for a short time. Lucy looked round but apparently did not catch his meaning.

"It puts me in mind of that scene in the opera, the one you acted on that memorable night. It is it almost over again. We want nothing but the long valley and the moonlight; and that small child-like figure, with the long floating hair, whose apparition stilled the house and set all hearts beating. Do you remember the air with which you began? its exquisite melody and pathos?"

"Can I forget it?" returned Lucy. "Listen."

She stood up, in the attitude in which she had stood that night, and commenced the song. Her hair, which had been loosened to suit her part, was now plaited round and round her head in massive glossy coils. It suited her better; she was more womanly now, more queenly, more dignified; there was more light in her eyes, and her face was a little less pale than of old; its whole beauty was marvellous. She raised one of her small white hands as she commenced her song; immediately the fire of genius lightened up her face, and transported her completely into the character she was assuming. Weber looked on and listened, enraptured. The whole thing had been done so unexpectedly that he had scarcely time to realize it. But he saw that she had lost none of her power; it was indeed a part of herself, and as long as she lived it could never go from her.

"It is wonderful!" he cried, as she sat down again. "You are better than ever, after this long absence from work. Do you not long to go back to your old life?"

"I seldom think of it," replied Lucy, colouring. "I did this quite on the impulse of the moment; without reflection. It struck me it would please you. Perhaps, too, I wanted to see if I had lost any of my old cunning. M. Weber, you cannot doubt which life I would choose if I had the option of both before me."

She looked at her husband, half shyly; as shyly and lovingly as when they were first married. Her nature was of that rare type that does not become weakened in its affections by familiarity. In one sense of the word she was as shy now as ever she had been with him. He glanced at her when she had spoken, almost doubting which of the two lives she would have chosen; but he could not mistake the look, as it sent the blood coursing more quickly to his heart.

"Has it been a great sacrifice, little wife?"

"Very," she returned, gravely. "So great, that if I had the choice to come over again I wonder which I should do?"

"Lucy, don't be wicked, or I shall take you at your word and give you back to M. Weber."

"Shall I go without being sent?"

"If you can."

She half rose as if to obey, but he caught her dress, and held her back.

"Why don't you go?"

"I find I cannot do as I would. I have a lord and master over me; a tyrant who tells me to do one thing and makes me do another."

"Are the bonds of this tyrant so irksome?"

"Yes, because so tight. So fast that they can never be loosened. I am a prisoner in them for ever."

"I think they are easier to bear than would have been the bonds of that other life."

"Ah! but think of the fame. Think of the homage of the world—the whole world. People would have approached me with as much veneration as the heathens of old did their idols. And what have I gained in exchange?"

"Lucy! are you in jest or in earnest?"

Rayner looked quite solemn; he never felt more powerfully that she had really sacrificed something great in giving up her profession.

She looked at him—still shyly—and her face flushed to a deep red: the intense light in her eyes thrilled through him.

"So earnest, that if I had to go over it all again, I would do as I have done. But I do not think I will ever tell you so again. Was your question really put for information upon the point?"

"If I reply yes—what will you say?"

"Et tu, Brute? Tell me that it was not."

"It was not—if you wish it."

"I wish the truth."

"You know the truth."

"I do: but did you?"

"That is the question," laughed Rayner. "'To be or not to be.—Whether 'tis easier'—"

"Oh! cease," she cried, stopping her ears. "You are no orator. You are only——"

"Only what?"

"Only—I will not say. Something far better."

"Are we not children?" cried Rayner, addressing Weber, who had been looking on and listening with an indescribable expression.

"A fair childhood," he replied. "I would that mine had been like unto it. It was a small sacrifice, indeed. What do you say, little man?"

The little man was evidently very indifferent upon the matter. Sheer astonishment had kept him still during his mother's song; since then he had crowed and screamed himself into a state of enjoyable tranquillity. After a very fixed stare at the questioner, as if resolving the problem in his own mind, he suddenly dropped his head upon Weber's shoulder, and prepared to go to sleep.

"Ah! that won't do," cried Lucy; and at a signal from her Mariette, who stood at a distance on the terrace, came forward and carried away the child. The same Mariette as ever; but now raised to a position of great dignity in the household.

"And so you really went and saw Monsieur Hermann and Made-moiselle Pauline before coming to us?" said Lucy. "How good of you! I know you did it for me, M. Weber, to bring me the last news of them. How were they looking?"

"As ever. Hermann does not cease to regret your departure. He says the organ loft has never since been the same. Half the pleasure of his life is gone. Pauline declares he has never been like himself.

She, too, misses you. See what traces you have left behind you wherever you have been, my Lady Lucy."

"And does he mourn over my lost fame?" asked Lucy.

"Almost as much as he would mourn the downfall of his country. You will have to go and show him what you have gained in exchange. Mademoiselle Pauline may become reconciled when she sees the baby. She adores babies, you know."

"Which I don't think you do," laughed Lucy, "or you'd not be so awkward with that one. All being well, we intend to pay them a visit this autumn. And for the days we remain there I will be as the Lucie of old: will take my place in the organ-loft of the cathedral, and prove to him what my sojourn in Italy did for me. You'll let me, William?"

"As you will, little wife."

"I think you had better not do that," said M. Weber. "Go, by all means; but do not revive old recollections. Hermann would only feel it the more when you were gone again."

"You make too much of his disappointment, M. Weber."

"You think so? I will leave you to judge."

"But I cannot forget that it was he himself sent me away from him. I know that it was for my own advancement; but it proves that he could not have valued me so much as—as you, for instance."

"You do not mean what you say," returned Weber. "You, of all people, know what it is to love unselfishly. Hermann is one of the least selfish of mortals. He was resigning you, as he thought, to fame and fortune; had he known how it would terminate, I doubt whether he would have been quite so ready to part with you."

"It is a marvellous change in three short years, certainly. I almost seem to have lived a life-time."

"Yes. You have learned experience early, for you have scarcely yet begun life. But I think most of the *incident* of your life is over."

"At any rate the doubt is," replied Lucy. "I may yet go through more incident; but never again through so much change. What should I have been had I never left home?"

"Not what you are now. Your character would have been less formed: your mind, perhaps, less cultivated. You would certainly have possessed no knowledge of your genius."

"I almost wish I did not. It is my only sad thought. Of what use is it to me? Why was it not given to one to whom it would have been useful?"

"That question is unlike you."

"I did not quite mean it. Nay, I would not part with it for the world, though I am unable to make the most of it. But it is the cause of some pain to me."

"And much pleasure. Your voice, at any rate, you can enjoy and gladden with it your hosts of friends, beginning with your husband and

children. For the rest, you have in return received an equivalent a thousand times greater."

She knew it perfectly well; but she did not say so. Though she had not very clearly expressed herself, she would not have exchanged her lot for all the fame in the world; but now and then the power within her would make itself felt, with a longing to be in action which she could not suppress, though she would soon dismiss it without a regret. To a certain extent this was inevitable, no matter how bright and happy her present life. She could not quite understand this, and therefore failed to express her meaning. She looked across at Weber, who was now twirling the ring Lord Haredale had given him, apparently in deep thought.

"It is still there," she said, smiling, referring in her own mind to the words she had uttered when she first put it on at his bidding.

"And flashes more brightly than ever," he replied, his mind also going back to that hour. "It has not often left its resting-place. Have you still those miniatures?"

"They are amongst my greatest treasures."

"She gazes at your portrait so often," said Rayner, laughing, "that one day I got jealous, and told her I should carry it away."

"And she gave it to you?"

"Did she! She made me some heroic reply about yielding it up with her life, or something of the sort."

"That is not quite true," cried Lucy, slightly blushing. "But I certainly would not easily part with any one of them, especially the portrait and the Bay of Naples."

"I am glad to find I am not forgotten, after all," said Weber, getting up from the grass. "I had almost feared it, and no wonder. In the positions of Lucie Martin and Lady Lucy Rayner, I find no resemblance, but in their minds I am rejoiced to find no change. You have been tried in a fiercer fire than you think of; have undergone an ordeal few could stand firmly; and I am thankful you have come off victorious. You are one of the few who have not disappointed me; one of the very few for whose sake I keep up my faith in human nature. But I must go in for a little while—I have letters to write. I claim you this evening at the piano, my Lord and my Lady Haredale not objecting."

He went in, leaving Rayner and Lucy alone. After a time they rose up; Lucy put her arm within her husband's, and they bent their steps as if with one impulse towards a spot frequently visited by them.

It was a glorious scene of nature; especially glorious now, in the glow of the setting sun. No vestige of human habitation was to be seen, with the exception of the ruins of St. Augustin's. But we have already described the spot in an early chapter of this history. One feature it possessed now that it had not then: a grave. A grave standing solitary

and alone amidst this scene of still life, yet not seeming to be out of place; alone, but not lonely. It was guarded by rails, but a small iron gate of admittance led quite up to the grave, which stood in the midst of a broad border of beautiful flowers. No stone rested upon it, but at its head rose a small marble cross, bearing a short and simple inscription.

"In Memory of
GEORGE, last VISCOUNT MASSERON,
Died at Naples, March 1st, 18—.

Rayner and Lucy passed through the gate, and stood close to the grave. Two years had gone by, and Lord Masseron was as present with them as when he had just died; his influence was still felt; even now they often fancied they heard the tones of his voice speaking to them, with its old marvellous sweetness. What his death had been to Rayner, he kept to himself. Not even to his wife did he ever speak of the blank it had created in his life; of the intense yearning he often felt and would continue to feel, to have his friend back with him, to be with him as they once had been, even if it was but for one single hour; to grasp his hand and show him the strong and undying friendship that was living within him; a friendship which was continually causing his mind to date forward to that time when they should once more meet, hand to hand and face to face. But he never spoke of it.

"Lucy," said Rayner, "I often wonder whether we have carried out completely his last wish. If he could speak, would he say we had done well?"

"Yes. It is just as it should be; just what he himself wanted. No stone; nothing but the grass and the flowers growing over him."

"He was right in choosing the spot. It is suited to him; is like his own bright and glorious nature. I cannot fancy him buried in any other. This grave is on the very spot where he used, as he phrased it, to lounge idly, dreaming or reading. I wish he was here to do it again."

"I don't think you do, William."

"Why not?"

"Because he is better off. I think his full time had come. You have the remembrance of your friendship to live upon. Suppose that he had lived, and that as you both grew older, it had grown colder and weaker? The world says that all friendship does."

"It is false. I do not and could not believe it. Still, I cannot test it in myself, for I shall never again make the opportunity. Never you believe such sophistry, Lucy. You and I—are we less like lovers now than in those first days? Friendship and love are two different things, I know; but in one sense they are alike."

She blushed as she looked timidly at him, but did not reply. The crimson sunset was reflected in her face, rendering her wondrously beautiful. As Rayner put the question, and gazed upon her, his heart

throbbed with the love he felt for his wife; a love, deep, calm, holy. He held her hands in his, and searched into her eyes.

"Lucy, we know each other better; do we therefore love less?"

"No," she answered, trembling.

"As the years go on, should we be spared, do you think our love will be less deep and fervent? more common-place—of the world, worldly?"

"Oh no! If I thought our love could change, it would kill me; I should pray that I might die. But that day will never come. We have remained true to our brother; we shall be true to ourselves."

"Then, my darling, what becomes of the opinions of the world, you just now cited?"

"They are not always obliged to be true."

"That is just it, wife of mine. If we measure our standard of action, of morality, of principles, by that of the world, we shall never do much, or rise above a certain level. The spirit of the world is one thing; the dictates of our souls another."

"That sounds almost uncharitable."

"Then St. Paul was uncharitable, though he speaks of charity as 'the more excellent way.' No; it is not uncharitable. I am not sitting in judgment on my fellow-men; the good and the bad are very much mixed up together, and at a first glance we cannot always tell the one from the other. Again, I know that we cannot always do the things that we would; we can only progress; but if we look abroad instead of looking to ourselves, we shall never do them at all. Does *that* sound hard?" he asked, smiling.

"Not from you, because you act up to it. I do not think you often do the things you would not."

"I have my battles to fight as well as every one else; moments of temptation; times of repentance. Who has not? George was perhaps one of the best and purest men that ever lived. Ah! Lucy, no one knows, although he was younger than I, what his influence was to me. He called out within me all that was noble, and by his power made of me what he would. It is one of my happiest thoughts that I am even a little like him."

"You are just like him. I always thought so when you were together, though in some things you were so different; in ways, and conversation, and action. But your natures were very similar. It was this I think that first made me——"

"What?" he asked, for she hesitated.

"Never mind," she said, laughing and blushing again. "Why did you ask me if I thought our love could change? Do you not *know* that it could not?"

"I do know it, Lucy. Will you hear me repeat my vow? When George was dying I promised him I would love and cherish you

to the end ; I promised it once after that ; here, over his grave, in the hearing, perhaps, of his spirit, I repeat the vow. As I fulfil it so may I be dealt with by Heaven. But, Lucy, it is my turn to ask now. Are you *quite* happy? quite sure you have no lingering regrets after that life of fame and glory you renounced—more, I believe, for my sake than for any other?"

"William, I almost believe you thought me in earnest just now! Why, you know better. I am perfectly happy. Too happy. Regrets for the past? No. I can have none as long as I have you to love and guide me ; to be my companion in this world and the next."

William Rayner smiled. There was no mistake, no fear, no regret. He drew her a little nearer to him, and left a fervent kiss upon her lips.

As the golden rays of the sun at that moment sank behind the hills, a lark flew up from the ground ; and, soaring high into the air, commenced its evening chant of happiness and freedom. The exquisite melody of the little bird, unseen but heard, fell upon Lucy's ear, and thrilled through her. She clasped her husband's arm with both hands, and as the tears coursed silently down her cheeks, prayed silently that the melody of the unseen bird might be a type of their own future life.

They turned from the grave, and arm in arm again, walking soberly, wended their way home in silence.

Leaving him, whom they had both so loved, buried alone.

CHARLOTTE MOREL.

BY JULIA KAVANAGH.

IT is the way of the world to speak of the Middle Ages as if they were dead and buried. It is also the way of the world to rear ponderous books over them, like so many grave-stones—volumes in the pages of which are inscribed epitaphs that are not always records of mediæval virtues.

Dead in most places the Middle Ages are—dead and forgotten. They have left no traces in the lives of men and women; they may linger in a few old churches, or castle walls, or ivied towers, but from the human mind and heart they have utterly passed away.

But far from the tracks of the railway, travellers now and then find out spots where mediæval life is not dead, but sleeping. The men wear coats, and the women chignons; but beneath these outward signs of the nineteenth century lie modes of thought and habits of life which certainly belong to another age than this. These places are mostly found abroad; little mousey provincial towns are they, not sufficiently interesting to attract antiquarians, and too poor to stimulate enterprise; places in which life is as dull and as torpid as it was three hundred years ago, and more.

To this quiet tribe belongs Verrières, in one of the central provinces of France. Wars and revolutions seem to have passed over it in vain. It has heard the mighty whirlwind of a people's wrath, and echoed to the cannon's roar; but like the enchanted Durandarte, whom Don Quixote saw in the cave of Montesimos, it has turned on its side, and taken a philosophical nap.

Money is of great account in places like this, and money has reached its full value in Verrières. That little humdrum town, with its long, silent street, and its green gardens spreading behind its old houses so quaint and grey, thinks a great deal of Mammon, not as seen in Three per Cents., or in railway shares, or even in bank-notes; but Mammon as he shows himself to his worshippers in gold, silver, or copper aspect, or in such goods as are daily exchanged for the same.

Thanks to Mammon, therefore, Monsieur Morel, the richest man in Verrières, held a high position in his native place. Monsieur Morel was a grocer and general dealer. He literally fed and clothed Verrières. Monsieur Morel sold flour, bacon, eggs, sugar, colonial goods, spirits and wine even, crockery, hardware, boots and shoes, cloths, silks, calico, linen, and every species of cheap stuff, not liable to sudden changes of fashion. He not only fed and clothed Verrières, as we

said, but a whole set of villages and hamlets which clustered around it as well; and as no competitor had ever stepped in to make him lower his prices, which were rather high, Monsieur Morel soon became a rich man, and grew richer with every year. He lived in a very old house, with many windows to it; windows high and narrow which, as well as the steep roof and massive chimney-stacks, spoke of a bygone age. In the broad and lofty rooms of that house—and it had many—he stored away his multifarious goods. Casks of butter, bales of coffee, sacks full of flour, piles of sugar-loaves in blue paper, could be seen by the admiring eyes of the children of Verrières, through the dusty and grated windows of the ground-floor. But still greater wonders were reported of the first, second, and third floors of Monsieur Morel's house. Piles upon piles of shining silks and fine broad-cloths were there, it was said; precious goods, never visited in their solemn and dusky retreat save by Monsieur Morel and his clerk Lenoir, a little, wiry old man, who went through life with a pen behind his ear. These two, Monsieur Morel and Lenoir, assisted by two stout servant-women, attended to the shop. This was not in the street, as might have been expected, but in the yard at the back of the house. A low, dingy-looking shop it was, in which perpetual twilight reigned, and where the sun never entered; but a shop in which the chink of money was heard all the day long, and all the year round. Light and sun it had had in its early days, when the yard merged into a pleasant garden, bounded by a little river which flowed between willows and aspen trees. But when Monsieur Morel's business so increased that he knew not where to turn to for spare room, the garden was sacrificed. Outhouses were raised in its stead, and a skylight roof extending from them to the large old house in front, enclosed the whole yard; in which, thanks to this shelter, more goods were stowed away.

Madame Morel was young when this was done, and she sorely lamented the loss of the garden where she used to sit on summer evenings, knitting and looking at the flowing river and the aspen trees and hoary willows, with the flushed sunset sky above them. To reconcile her to the change, her husband turned the yard into a sort of greenhouse. Glossy ivy was trained against the walls, and soon covered them with sombre verdure. With ivy mingled light summer creepers that climbed up to the skylight, and hung thence over sacks, and bales, and packages in graceful banners, receiving air from a high-arched gateway that led from the street to the shop, and thriving in their captivity.

Very cool, green, and pleasant looked this yard from the street. Strangers wondered at it, and the people of Verrières were proud of it. Madame Morel did not live to enjoy it. She died when her first child was born. Her widowed husband never married again; but though caring little for them himself, he cherished and tended the ivy and the creepers for his dead wife's sake.

Sovereigns have their cares. Wars, foreign alliances, bickerings with royal brothers and sisters, embitter the lives of ladies and gentlemen who wear crowns and sit on thrones. No wonder, therefore, that, apart from his wife's death, Monsieur Morel had troubles incidental to his position. The chief of these was, that the late Madame Morel had not given him a son, but a daughter.

"Ah, Lenoir," he would say to his clerk, "the mother-abbess gives me the best account of the little thing's temper and abilities; my own eyes tell me that she is both pretty and healthy. But it is a great trial that I have not got a Charles, but a Charlotte. The business, you know."

"It is a great pity that Mademoiselle Charlotte is not Monsieur Charles," Lenoir would ruefully answer. "It certainly was a great mistake." And this error of the late Madame Morel became a standing grievance between these two.

When Madame Morel's mistake was about seven years old, she came home to her father's on a week's holiday. A very pretty, quiet, demure child, with black eyes and a rosy face, was Charlotte Morel. And very pretty she looked when she acted as bridesmaid to her father's sister, who married Monsieur Roussel, the notary, about this time. Monsieur Roussel was a widower, and his son, Henri, a lad of twelve, took a great fancy to Mademoiselle Charlotte. He sat by her at the wedding dinner; he danced with her in the evening; and when she complained of being fatigued, he chivalrously put her on his back, and carried her home. Monsieur Morel, who was already looking out for a son-in-law, and who liked the aspect of this handsome and spirited lad, slapped him on the back, and said, cheerily:

"That's right, Henri; carry your little wife."

Upon which, Henri, turning his frank face and blue eyes to Charlotte, said, gaily:

"Will you marry me, Charlotte? Eh, will you marry me?"

The proposal, coming as it did when Charlotte was on her suitor's back, with her arms around his neck, was an awkward one. She looked shy and doubtful; before she could answer, Henri's uncle and godfather, Monsieur Roussel, the farmer, interfered, and said, sarcastically:

"Do not say yes, Charlotte, or you will repent it, for you see Henri has a temper."

Henri became crimson, and bit his lip.

"Henri will improve," hesitatingly said his father.

"Please to put me down?" asked Charlotte.

"I will not," passionately replied the boy. "I will carry you, whether you like it or not, mamzelle."

Charlotte submitted; but when they reached home, and Henri put her down, she would neither look at him nor bid him good-night.

"You are a sulky little thing," he said, angrily.

A remark which Charlotte did not deign to answer.

The breach might have widened if Mademoiselle Morel had not gone back to her convent the very next morning. When these two met again, she had grown to be a decorous young lady, and he a civil young man; and neither attempted to renew the passages of their childhood.

Charlotte was about eighteen when Monsieur Morel said one morning to Lenoir:

"I must see about a son-in-law."

But where was the young man to be found who could be both Charlotte Morel's husband and Monsieur Morel's successor? Where was the lover and the man of business? All Verrières could not yield him. The shrewd, sharp man was either married, or too old, or blind of an eye, and the agreeable young man was either a spendthrift, or a bad accountant, or simply empty-headed.

"I must try Henri Roussel," said Monsieur Morel, with a sigh. Monsieur Lenoir heard, and groaned, and turned up his eyes. Matters must be bad indeed for Monsieur Morel to take such a resolve as this.

Henri Roussel was now a very fine, manly-looking young fellow, with plenty of brains, but with a reckless, ungovernable temper, which had already led him into various scrapes, and which kept his father, a weak, nervous man, and his stepmother, a timid, yielding woman, in a constant state of fever and uneasiness. Monsieur Roussel was the notary of Verrières, and he lived in the house next to that of his brother-in-law, another gray old mansion, but with two gilt 'scutcheons over the gateway, and numerous blue, red, and yellow bills, announcing sales of farms, and châteaux, and fields, and vineyards, stuck on either side of the entrance. To him Monsieur Morel first broached his proposal.

"Please yourself; but neither you nor anyone else will do any good with Henri," despondently answered Monsieur Roussel. "In this very room I told him so only yesterday."

The room which had witnessed this paternal denunciation was a square and lofty apartment. It had a dingy bookcase full of ponderous law-books, a dingy table covered with yellow papers, and a dull, rusty-looking iron safe, no doubt full of title-deeds and valuable documents. It was not a fascinating room for a lively young man.

"Perhaps he will like business better than the law," said Monsieur Morel.

His brother-in-law shook his head.

"Henri can live on the little fortune his mother left him," he said, "and Henri will like nothing. Mind," he added, expanding his hands, "you take him on your own responsibility."

Thus comforted, Monsieur Morel went down stairs. His sister was

knitting in a dull parlour, with her two daughters by her. When they had been sent away, and her brother explained his plans, the good lady dropped ten stitches of her knitting.

"Poor Charlotte!" she said. "Why, he will break the child's heart with his temper."

Monsieur Morel said something about some one who was not so black as he was painted, upon which he was told that he did not know Henri Roussel.

"Well, then," he retorted, losing patience, "I cannot help myself; beggars cannot be choosers."

And he went forthwith to find the sinner—whom he had always liked, to say the truth—at the end of the garden. A pleasant, sunlit garden was this—half garden, half orchard, and sloping down to the river-side. Monsieur Morel walked down trim paths, with beds of stocks and wallflowers blossoming very sweetly in the light shade of apple trees, till he came to the river. There he found Henri Roussel in his shirt-sleeves, mending and hammering a boat with right good will. He was twenty-three then, a tall and very handsome young man, with a tinge of red in his yellow locks, but with a frank look in his blue eyes and an open smile, which Monsieur Morel had always liked. At once, in few but plain words, he expounded his errand and made his proposal. Henri heard him, sitting on the side of the boat, with the hammer in one hand and his chin resting on the palm of the other.

"Thank you, uncle," he said, gravely; "but you know I never took to the law."

"The law is one thing, and business is another," replied Monsieur Morel.

"Yes: I want life, motion, variety. Business gives these—the law does not. And you want me to marry Charlotte," continued the young man, gravely. "You know I am by no means so rich as she is."

"That is *my* business."

"But how will she like it, uncle?"

"That is *your* business," answered Monsieur Morel, smiling.

The colour deepened on the young man's cheek; he was silent awhile, then he made one last objection.

"My father, my stepmother, my two sisters all declare that I have a bad and violent temper. Are you willing, nevertheless, to trust me with your daughter's happiness?"

"I am," stoutly replied Monsieur Morel; "for if you have a warm temper, for which the colour of your hair may be answerable, I believe you have also a generous heart, and that you are incapable of making my little Charlotte unhappy."

Henri Roussel said nothing, but his blue eyes were dim and his lips quivered as he rose and held out his hand, which Monsieur Morel grasped cordially. It was a bargain, and the young man came that

same evening, not to live in the house, which was not needed, but to have a long business conversation with his uncle. He proved an apt pupil. There was life and activity in the business, as Monsieur Morel had truly said. Henri Roussel had to travel and go about to fairs and markets, and he showed such business talents and gave such satisfaction, that Monsieur Morel sent for his daughter in order to conclude the matter as soon as possible.

Mademoiselle Charlotte Morel had rarely left her convent, and her few glimpses of the world seemed to have had little effect upon her. She was as quiet and demure as any little nun. Rather little she was, though not ungracefully so—little, but very pretty, with a rosy, round face, charming dimples, lovely black eyes, and glossy black hair. This attractive young person also had an amiable and even temper, and more practical sense than ladies of her years are supposed to possess. Her father laid his plans open to her with perfect candour. His fortune was invested in his business, and his son-in-law must also, if possible, be his successor. He was quite satisfied with Henry Roussel, and though he wished to lay no compulsion upon her, he hoped that his daughter would like the young man. Charlotte heard him out, with her eyes downcast, and her hands folded on her lap, and then said gravely:

“Has he not a bad temper?”

“Rather hasty, perhaps,” reluctantly said Monsieur Morel; “but Henri Roussel would never be to a young and agreeable wife what he may have been to his family, you know.”

Charlotte raised her eyebrows in mingled surprise and doubt on hearing this.

“I hope to get old,” she said, quaintly.

Monsieur Morel, not knowing what to say, began praising the young man’s talent, assiduity, and good looks.

“Henri always begins very well,” composedly replied Charlotte, “and I know he is clever.”

“And very handsome,” persisted Monsieur Morel, shrewdly.

His daughter answered with the untranslatable “*comme ça*,” to which “so-so” is no equivalent; and no more was said on the subject.

To all appearance, matters went on very well between the young people. Charlotte sat and worked in a room next the shop on the ground-floor, and there Henri would go and join her now and then. The door remained open, and from the shop Monsieur Morel watched them with a pleased eye. He saw his pretty daughter sitting near the window, around which the creepers hung. How quiet and demure she looked, with her downcast eyes, whilst Henri Roussel, leaning against the wall, gazed down at her in evident admiration!

“I fancy it will do,” thought Monsieur Morel; but to be sure of it, he questioned his daughter. Charlotte was silent awhile; then she said:

"I mistrust him. He had a temper once, and he seems to have lost it."

"Because he is fond of you."

"Ah, but suppose he should cease being fond of me?"

Now, as ill-luck would have it, Monsieur Morel repeated this conversation to Henri Roussel. The young man heard him, and said nothing, but bit his lip and turned very red. He sometimes rowed Charlotte and his sisters down the river of an evening, and he did so late on the afternoon of this day. The sun was setting behind the old church of Verrières. Blue and gold were in the sky, and mingled in the placid surface of the little stream with the green shadows of the aspens and the willows. The boat floated past quiet gardens; as he rowed, Henri looked at Charlotte with mingled love and anger. The young girl sat still, for Louise, Henri's youngest sister, had fallen asleep on her lap.

"Why do you not trust me, Charlotte?" asked Henri, abruptly.

Charlotte raised her eyes in some wonder; then guessing the truth, she coloured a little, but replied, composedly:

"What difference does it make to you whether I trust you or not?"

Her cool tone, her unmoved look, exasperated him. In a moment Henri recovered the temper which the fair Charlotte supposed him to have lost. His eyes flashed, his lips trembled with resentment.

"You must be heartless to put such a question," he said, impetuously.

Charlotte looked at him very earnestly:

"Thank you," she said, bowing her head with ironical courtesy.

"Pray be so kind as to row me back."

He complied without saying a word. That same evening Charlotte quietly informed her father that she should never marry Henri Roussel.

"The man who cannot rule himself shall never rule me," she said.

Monsieur Morel was much annoyed, and much troubled. He did his best to convince Charlotte that she had better give Henri another trial; but the proposal was evidently so distasteful to her, and she shrank from it with such pain, that he did not insist.

"Very well," he said, desperately; "I must send off poor Henri, and you must go back to the convent till I have found some one else."

To this sentence Charlotte submitted without a word. She went away the very next morning. Henri said, bitterly:

"I do not know why I regret her: she did not care a rush for me." And he, too, went, not merely from his uncle's house, but from Verrières, which he left for Paris, and entered a large commercial house.

Nothing came of Monsieur Morel's search for some one else. He lived in hope, and left his daughter safe behind convent walls till she was twenty-one, when grim Death settled his perplexity by calling him very suddenly away one summer morning.

Verrières was much startled by the news, and Verrières' first thought

on the subject was a pithy homily on the vanity of human sorrow. Verrières grieved very little for the dead man, but wondered very much who was going to step into his shoes. Several individuals for whose business talents Monsieur Morel had entertained a strong contempt, had visions of purchasing the business, and lording it in the great old house; they sounded Lenoir, the old clerk, and as he heard them out and returned diplomatic replies, they one and all felt pretty sure of success. Monsieur Lenoir was very much perplexed. He consulted with Mademoiselle Morel's nearest relatives, and they all came to the conclusion that Monsieur Roussel, her uncle's brother, ought to be the successful applicant; he was not, indeed, the successor such a man as Monsieur Morel should have had, but he was the least objectionable of all the claimants for the dead man's honours. Monsieur Morel had been dead a fortnight, when Lenoir thought he could broach the subject to his late master's daughter. She had come back for the funeral, and being of age, had no thought of returning to the convent. Her grief was such as a good-hearted girl must feel for the death of a parent of whom she knows little; sincere, but by no means violent. Mademoiselle Charlotte Morel was, in short, in that subdued, but even frame of mind which is perfectly equal to the transaction of business. Lenoir found her in one of the upper rooms, engaged with one of the maid-servants in unrolling some cloth. She did not hear him coming in, and he could not help shaking his head as he saw her; a plump, rosy, good-humoured girl of twenty-one, with glossy black hair, and lively black eyes, and a pretty, round, good-tempered face. Oh! if she had but been a boy, he thought, with a deep sigh. Charlotte heard the sigh, and looking up, saw the old man standing in the doorway, with his pen behind his ear, and a woe-begone meaning on his wrinkled face.

"Monsieur Lenoir," she said, knitting her smooth brow into a frown, "do you know that this cloth is moth-eaten?"

Monsieur Lenoir was very sorry to hear it, but begged for five minutes' private conversation with Mademoiselle.

"To be sure," airily replied Charlotte. "Marie, you will fold up that calico, please. I shall be down directly."

Monsieur Lenoir sighed again. His errand was a sad one, but it must be spoken. To his amazement, Charlotte interrupted him at once.

"Thank you," she said, "but please tell that Monsieur Roussel that I shall carry on the business myself."

If the pen had not been very firm indeed behind Monsieur Lenoir's ear, it must have dropped at so astounding an announcement. Without seeming to perceive his amazement, as expressed in staring eyes and open mouth, Mademoiselle Morel continued: "Whenever my poor father came to see me, he lamented that I was a girl; so not knowing what might happen, I did my best to qualify myself for business. I learned book-keeping."

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"But, mademoiselle," interrupted Lenoir, "book-keeping is nothing—nothing. You do not know the intricacies of business."

In her turn Mademoiselle Morel interrupted the clerk. She laid her hand upon his arm, and looking in his face, she said, good-humouredly but very firmly,—

"I know good butter, and good flour, and good cloth, and good wares, Monsieur Lenoir, and none but good wares will I keep. My father neither took nor gave credit, I believe. His word also was his bond; he was honourable in his dealings, and prudent in his ventures. What he did, I shall do; and Monsieur Lenoir," she added, feelingly, "no cloth of this texture and this price shall get moth-eaten under my rule. Why," she added, raising her eyebrows, pursing her lips and shaking her young head, "here are several hundred francs lost at the very least."

Monsieur Lenoir stared and was dumb. Remonstrance was useless, and he knew it. Of course this poor, deluded young thing would never get on—never, not even with his assistance—but she had a will of her own, she was of age too, and it was plain that she emerged from her convent with the determination of having her own way henceforward.

Monsieur Lenoir was simply and sadly sceptical, but Verrières was bitterly ironical. It foretold Mademoiselle Morel's downfall, and watched her going down. The process was not a rapid one. Charlotte got on very well. Monsieur Lenoir did the travelling and the going-about, and she stayed at home and minded the business. It was hard for one so young to lead this dull, confined life, and so Charlotte soon found; but pleasure is unknown in Verrières, and she had no choice. Sometimes she wondered if she should go on so till old age, buying and selling, and making money; but she was so far a true daughter of mediæval Verrières, that she never thought of exchanging the dulness of her native place for the gaieties of a large city. Now and then, indeed, she longed for the country, and gardens, and green fields; but she could not have these and attend to business, so she tried to be content with her shop, and her store-rooms, and the yard, and the creepers, and to find music in that chink of money which had so long charmed her father's ears. In the meanwhile, Verrières went on wondering how long she would last. At first, Mademoiselle Morel knew nothing of the commotion her unexpected resolve had excited. But by-and-by, good-natured people, who felt bound to tell her, let her into the secret. She thus learned that her downfall, slow, but sure, was predicated, and that not even in her own family was a voice raised to prophecy her success. Louise Roussel, a little chatterer of some seven years old, whom Charlotte was very fond of, gave her more information on that head than Charlotte cared to hear. She came in to her one evening, flushed and breathless with excitement.

"Oh! cousin," she cried, running up to Mademoiselle Morel, who

was in the yard watering the creepers, "such news! My big brother Henri has just arrived."

"Indeed."

"Yes; for a week only, you know. They all say I am so like him. Am I like him?" And she raised herself on tiptoe, and shook her auburn hair, for Charlotte the better to see the likeness.

Mademoiselle Morel looked down into the child's bright face.

"Yes, you are like him," she said, abstractedly, and she remained thus, with the watering-pot in her hand, like one in a dream.

"And they told him about you, you know," pursued Louise, "and papa groaned, and said you would never do. And uncle Joseph laughed, and said you would never do; and Henri, you know, said, why not? Women do very well in business when they have brains and no heart."

Charlotte was silent; if it were not that she changed colour a little, she looked as if she had not heard the child.

"And Henri is going to uncle Joseph's, to-night," continued the little thing; "and as he will not be back till Friday, mamma will ask you to come and spend to-morrow's holiday with us. They asked Henri if he would mind seeing you—he said, no; but it would be awkward for a whole day."

Still Charlotte was silent.

"How hot it is under this skylight!" she said, at last, "come out with me, Louise," and passing through one of the outhouses, they came out on the brink of the river behind it. Charlotte had had a wooden bench placed there, and of an evening, when the shop was shut, she liked to come and sit here and breathe a little fresh air. It was also a favourite haunt of Monsieur Lenoir's, who was a great angler, and who devoted to his favourite pursuit everything like spare time. They found him there, standing on a stone, stiff, straight, and still, like an old heron watching for his prey. Charlotte sat down on the bench without speaking to him, and Louise nestled against her. The evening was very calm and still. The stream was silvery and grey; above the willows and aspens on the opposite bank rose a pale crescent moon; the lowing of distant cattle came from remote pastures, and from the neighbouring garden, the gay laughter of the Roussels. Presently, a boat shot forth, and turned on the stream. Charlotte saw that Henri, a strange young man, and Marie, the elder sister of Louise, were in it. Marie was laughing, very gaily, and half in mirth, half in real fear, she was clinging to her brother.

"Take care," he said, gently; "take care." And even as he spoke, he saw Charlotte sitting on the bench, with Louise by her side. He was bare-headed, but he rose and bowed very gravely, then sitting down again he rowed on. The voices lessened, then died away, the boat vanished in a bend of the river, everything was calm and silent, and the stars came out one by one in the deepening blue of the sky, and Char-

lotte Morel felt very sad and very lonely. But as she rose and went in with Louise, she thought: "I would do it over again."

She took the child to her own house. She found Monsieur Roussel in the garden. He asked her to sit down; and not having any fear of seeing Henri, she complied whilst her uncle resumed his digging.

"And how are you getting on?" he said, after awhile, resting on his spade to address her.

"I am getting on well, uncle, I thank you."

Monsieur Roussel groaned, and shook his head.

"Get married," he said; "get married, Charlotte."

"I am in no hurry, uncle."

"Well, you did wonderfully well not to take Henri, at least," he said ruefully. "What do you think he came for?"

Charlotte did not answer.

"Why, to ask me for seven thousand five hundred francs. Neither more nor less. 'What for?' said I. 'But that he could not tell,' he replied. Seven thousand five hundred francs!" exclaimed Monsieur Roussel, in pious horror. "That boy will not end well, Charlotte."

Perhaps Charlotte had found to her own cost that one's friends are liberal of such prophecies, for she did not look so horrified as Monsieur Roussel evidently expected.

"You do not mean to say you think that natural?" he exclaimed, looking injured.

"I think nothing about it, uncle. Where is aunt?"

Madame Roussel now joined them. She, too, was full of the seven thousand five hundred francs.

"You know what Henri came for?" she said, plaintively.

"Yes; uncle has told me. What a fine evening!"

"Will you come and spend to-morrow with us? Henri will not be at home," continued Madame Roussel.

"I am not afraid of Henri," rather proudly replied Charlotte; "but I shall be glad to spend to-morrow with you," she added, with a little sigh, "holidays seem so lonely."

The Verrières fashion of spending holiday is a dull one.

A good dinner, a walk in the garden, and a round game of cards in the evening, was all the entertainment that Madame Roussel thought needful for her family. A thunderstorm interfered with one part of the programme: the garden was inaccessible. The dinner and the round game remained. Very long and wearisome seemed the dinner to Charlotte, who did not care for good cheer; and the evening was not much better. She soon lost all her counters, and was henceforth out of the game. Whilst the others played on, she leaned back in her chair, listening to the wind, which was rising, and to the rain that now beat wildly against the window-panes. Monsieur Roussel was peering at the cards through his gold spectacles; Marie showed her hand to her

mother, who nodded and smiled; and little Louise, leaning her head heavily against Charlotte, was falling asleep. Mademoiselle Morel looked at them a little wistfully. There is pleasure and also pain in beholding a family circle when we are ourselves alone.

"If they had not asked me to join them," thought Charlotte, "I must have sat alone in my room this evening; and, because they asked me, he left the house—just as he left Verrières on my account four years ago. They do not seem to miss him much; and yet they surely care more about him than they care about me?"

A violent knocking at the front door roused her from her reverie. She looked up, with a start, and found the notary, his wife, and daughter exchanging alarmed glances.

"Why, what can have happened!" began Monsieur Roussel. "Surely——"

Here the knocking was repeated more violently than before, and this time the shuffling step of the servant, coming from the back of the house, said that she was hastening to give the impatient visitor admittance. They heard the front door opening, and some one rushed in; then the door of the room in which they were sitting burst open, and Monsieur Joseph Roussel broke in upon them, with wild looks, wet garments, and a dripping umbrella.

"My money!" he gasped. "My money!" he shouted, recovering breath, and striking the floor with his umbrella. "Where is my money?"

They looked at him aghast. Monsieur Roussel remained with the uplifted card he was going to play in his hand, and stared at his brother with open mouth and eyes.

"I tell you I want my money," doggedly resumed Joseph. "I want my seven thousand five hundred francs."

"Seven thousand five hundred francs!" repeated the notary, turning livid, and a dreadful light seeming to break upon him as he heard the amount of the sum.

"Yes, seven thousand five hundred francs," sternly said Henri's uncle and godfather—"seven thousand five hundred francs, which were taken out of my desk this afternoon when Henri was in the house—do you hear?" and he rolled his eyes about and winked at them all with terrible significance.

Monsieur Roussel tried to speak, but words would not come to him. He sank forward on the table, and with his head lying there, uttered a deep, heart-broken groan. Madame Roussel raised her hands to heaven, and uttered a despairing cry.

"We are ruined—ruined, disgraced, undone!" she said, wildly; and falling back into her chair, she went into hysterics; upon which Marie began sobbing violently, and little Louise, who had been staring round her in dismay, uttered a succession of piercing shrieks. Charlotte alone preserving some presence of mind, ran to her aunt's assistance, and

endeavoured to calm her. Joseph Roussel looked around him in grim and gloomy triumph, winking rapidly.

"Spare the rod and spoil the child," he said; "I knew how it would be—I always said so."

"For heaven's sake, have mercy on us!" cried Monsieur Roussel, looking up, wildly. "Perhaps—perhaps Henri did not do it."

"Then who did?" angrily retorted his brother. "Do you want to cheat me out of my money, eh? You told me yourself he came to borrow seven thousand five hundred francs—did you not? Well, I tell you that I left Henri alone in the room with my desk, and when I came back at the end of a quarter of an hour, Henri had vanished, the key, which I had forgotten on the table, was in the desk, and seven thousand and five hundred francs in notes were gone. But if you think that I am going to bear with that loss just because Henri is my nephew and godson, you are very much mistaken, all of you," added Monsieur Joseph Roussel, glaring at the dismayed family, and striking the floor again with his umbrella.

"Henri shall return that money: he only meant to borrow it, of course," agitatedly said the notary. "But he shall return it, Joseph."

"And do you suppose I am going to wait till he returns my money?" exclaimed Joseph Roussel, looking indignant and amazed at the suggestion. "What brought me here, pray?"

"And how do I know that my son took your money?" asked Monsieur Roussel, with a feeble effort at scepticism.

"Did I not tell you so?" cried his brother, enraged.

"Well, but did you see him doing it?" desperately asked Monsieur Roussel—"did you see him?"

Joseph Roussel stared till his little eyes seemed ready to start out of their sockets.

"See him!" he at length gasped forth—"see him open my desk, and take out my hard-earned money, seven thousand five hundred francs!—you ask me if I saw him doing that? No, sir," he indignantly exclaimed, answering his own question, "I did not see him, because he took care not to do it till my back was turned. But I can tell you what—Jean, my servant, heard and saw. He saw your son Henri at the post-office, handing over to the post-mistress a letter with five blue seals—five blue seals—and declaring it to be worth seven thousand five hundred francs! What do you think of that?"

The notary groaned. "For heaven's sake, have mercy on me," he said, piteously.

"I want my money, sir; my money!"

"You shall have it, though it will half ruin me," distractedly said Monsieur Roussel; "but keep it quiet—oh, keep it quiet!"

"And what did I come here for but to keep it quiet?" screamed Joseph, at the pitch of his voice; "what did I come here for?"

"It will ruin me," said Henri's father, despairingly; "it will ruin me."

On hearing this, Madame Roussel burst into tears, and with many piteous sobs she asked why her children were to be plundered for Henri's misdeeds. Her husband heard her with a dull, vacant stare of misery. There is a tragic hour in most lives, however tame and commonplace may seem their current, and that tragic hour had come to him. Grief and despair gave a terrible meaning to his little peevish face, and Charlotte's heart sank within her as she heard him mutter, in a low, dull voice, "I will not be disgraced. On the day when this is known in Verrières, I shall just go down the garden, and make a hole in the water: I will not be disgraced."

Even as he uttered the words, the door opened and Henri, who had come back in his boat and walked up the garden, entered the room.

"Cards," he said, carelessly, "cards—who wins?"

No one answered. He gave a sharp look round the room, and at once his careless look vanished. But he did not speak. He stood without uttering one word, evidently waiting. His father rose.

"Henri," he said, sternly, "you sent off seven thousand five hundred francs to Paris to-day."

Henri looked thunderstruck.

"I did," he replied, at length.

"To whom?"

"I cannot tell."

"From whom did you get that money?"

"I cannot tell."

The young man spoke very sullenly, and looked black as night at that cross-examination.

"You must get that money back," said his father, trying to speak composedly, though he was deadly pale, "for your uncle," he added, pointing to the dark part of the room where Joseph Roussel stood leaning on his umbrella. "Your uncle had his desk opened to-day, and seven thousand five hundred francs taken from it."

Henri gave a sudden start, and turned dreadfully pale.

"You did not think I should miss it so soon, did you?" asked his uncle Joseph, nodding grimly at him; "but you had scarcely turned your back on the house when I wanted some money, and found out that my seven thousand five hundred francs were gone. Thank your stars that I am your godfather as well as your uncle," he added, in a menacing voice. "Thank your stars, I say!"

Henri sank on a chair, and thence looked at him, then from him to his father. At first it seemed as if words would not pass his white lips. When he spoke at length, it was to address the notary and say:

"Father, what do you say to this?"

Monsieur Roussel raised his trembling hand towards him.

"God forgive you, Henri," he said, in a broken voice.

Henri leaped up from the chair on which he was sitting; his blue eyes flashed like fire, his pale face grew still paler with wrath, as iron is at its hottest when it is whitest, and in a voice of thunder he cried :

"Father! father! what do you mean?"

"Do!—threaten your father after dishonouring him," cried Madame Roussel, starting up in mingled fear and hate.

Henri gave his stepmother a look of indignation and scorn; but before he could open his lips to reply, Charlotte went up to the notary, and laying her hand on his arm, she said in a low, indignant voice, whilst her other outstretched hand pointed to Henri Roussel, "Uncle, uncle, do you not see that your son is innocent?"

"Innocent!" gasped the notary, staring round the room, "how so?"

"How so! look at him and see it. Henry Roussel is innocent—I tell you he is innocent," she added, her eyes flashing with generous indignation, "and that you ought all to die with shame at having doubted him."

"Yes, I am innocent," sternly said the young man; "and, what is more, I can prove it. That money which uncle so kindly accuses me of having taken from his desk, I already had when I saw him. I borrowed it on my vineyard above Verrières. Ask Farmer Grangé, and see if he will deny it."

"Then who took my money?" cried Monsieur Joseph Roussel, looking very wild.

"That is your business, not mine," bitterly replied the young man; then looking round him he added: "I have learned this evening what trust in my honour I may expect in this house. Let none of you wonder that I shall henceforth make my home among strangers. I leave Verrières this very night—now, this moment, and it will be strange indeed if I ever set foot in it again."

He looked round the room once more; then going straight up to the spot where Charlotte stood alone:

"God bless you!" he said, with much emotion, "God bless you!"

She did not answer. She stood there before him, passive, and like one in a dream. He said no more, but turned away, and was gone. As the door closed upon him, as they heard his step rapidly going up the staircase, the notary, recovering from his amazement, turned angrily on his brother:

"How dare you come with your cock-and-bull stories to me?" he cried, with fury. "How dare you accuse my son of robbery?"

Monsieur Joseph Roussel slapped his forehead. Then a sudden light seemed to break upon him.

"I know who did it," he cried; "I know;" and he rushed out of the house like one distracted.

The notary threw himself down on a chair, and addressing his wife, said, very ruefully:

"Louise, you should have told me not to believe it—you should have told me."

Madame Roussel raised her pocket-handkerchief to her eyes, and speaking from behind it, said, in a melancholy voice :

"It all falls upon me because I am not his mother."

Charlotte signed to Marie to follow her out of the room. When they both stood outside the door, she whispered :

"Go and beg of your brother not to leave the house to-night."

"I dare not," replied Marie, whose eyes were red with weeping ;
"Henri never minds me."

"Try, Marie—try," urged Charlotte.

The girl went reluctantly, and very anxiously Charlotte waited for her at the foot of the staircase. Marie soon came down again ; Henri's door was locked, and he had refused to admit her. Madame Roussel, who now joined them, heard this, and looked piteously at her niece.

"Do try, Charlotte," she said ; "do try."

"I !" said Charlotte, with a start.

"Yes, do. My poor husband is broken-hearted, but will not say a word to keep him, and Henri would not mind me ; but he will at least hear you. If he would only stay to-night ! Do try, Charlotte ! You can go and sit upstairs, and speak to him when he is coming down."

She put a light in her niece's hand, and Charlotte took it like one in a dream. She went up to the room on the first floor, and sat down leaving the door open. Everything looked very gaunt and dreary in the pale light of the wax candle, burning quietly on the table. The tall, ledger-like books, the dull iron safe, the stiff, black chairs, were very grim and forbidding of aspect ; but Charlotte, if she saw, did not heed them. She was listening to sounds in the room above, sounds of hurried footsteps and moving furniture, which ended at length in the unlocking of a door and a step coming down the staircase. Without leaving her chair, or even looking round, Charlotte said, in a low voice :

"Henri !"

She spoke so low that he might not have heard her ; but he did. He came in at once. He threw the carpet-bag he was carrying on the floor ; he drew a chair near hers, and sitting down upon it, he took the hand that hung loosely in the folds of her black dress, and he raised it to his lips.

"God bless you for your faith in me !" he said, in a low voice ;
"I shall never forget it—never."

"I trust you are not going," she said, without looking round at him.
"Your father, your mother, are deeply grieved."

"Do not believe it," he interrupted, bitterly ; "they never loved me, or they could not have thought me guilty so readily. What have I ever done to deserve such an insult as this ?"

"Ah ! nothing—nothing indeed," Charlotte could not help saying ;
"but they repent it : forgive them."

"Willingly; but I will not live with them. This evening has burned itself into my very soul. It has shown me two things it is not in my power to forget—their doubt, and your faith in my honour." He rose as he said this.

"Pray, do stay," she urged.

"Stay! What for?" he asked, moodily. "They will suspect me next for that money; they will want to know what I am doing with it and if I do not tell—and I will not tell them—they will shake their heads, and say, 'Henri is going to ruin. We always said so.'"

Charlotte was silent.

"But you must think no harm of me for that," he resumed, eagerly; "that money is to save a friend from disgrace. I run no risk; I have security to double the amount I lend; but to have it known that he borrows would ruin him, and ruin him so thoroughly that I should not have told you so much, only I could not bear you should think, as they will be sure to say, that I am a spendthrift and a profligate."

"Pray, do stay," she said, again.

"I cannot. You have been very good to me this evening—better than I deserve; but I cannot stay."

"Why so?"

"Do not ask me." His voice shook as he uttered the words.

For the first time Charlotte turned her face towards him. Their looks met: their eyes were very dim with tears; yet each read the same story in the other's gaze. In a moment the tale was told, understood, and firmly believed in for ever.

"Then you like me—you do like me!" cried Henri, amazed and delighted.

"A little, but very little," she replied, smiling demurely; "for, if you go, how can I like you?"

"Ah, how can I go now!" he exclaimed, overjoyed.

All the wisdom of Verrières went distracted on the day when Charlotte and Henri's banns were published. A nice mess of poor Monsieur Morel's money those two would make, and a nice life they would lead. It is mortifying to record it, but the wisdom of Verrières was again all wrong. The business flourished in the hands of the young pair, and Charlotte's faith in him was the spell which bound the dragon of Henri's temper for ever. Never once—and three years have passed since their wedding-day—did that fierce dragon waken when she was concerned, though truth compels us to say that Henri's uncle and godfather once or twice found how that same dragon was not always sleeping.

The unfortunate gentleman's seven thousand five hundred francs were never recovered, and the mystery of their disappearance promises to become one of the legends of Verrières.

TASSO'S STORY.

TORQUATO TASSO inherited a noble descent from both his parents. His father had, however, fallen into reduced circumstances, and had taken service in the household of the Prince of Salerno. It would seem that, from his very birth, Torquato was intended for a poet, since it chanced that he was born amid one of the loveliest scenes in Italy. In the year 1544 Bernardo (such was the elder Tasso's name) went with his wife, from Naples, where they usually resided, to visit some relations at Sorrento; and there, where nature seems to have gathered together all that is best in colour and perfume and sound to weave for herself one rich mantle of seductive beauty, Torquato first saw the light. The murmur of the Mediterranean was his first lullaby; his first plaything a branch, laden with flower and fruit, plucked from an orange-tree. A few months after their son's birth his parents returned to Naples. Here Tasso spent the earliest years of his boyhood, and his talents began very soon to display themselves in his rapid acquisition of Greek and Latin, in the vast and retentive grasp of his memory, and in frequent airy excursions into the kingdom of poetry. The precocity of his genius in this latter respect may have been, in some measure, owing to the singular loveliness of the external world around him, and to the varied tide of social life which flowed through Naples in those days when it was under foreign rule. When the boy gazed from his window in the moonlight he beheld Vesuvius, his awful head wrapped in a mantle of vapour, standing like the gigantic mysterious guardian of the sleeping bay below. Or he may have been aroused at midnight by the cry of "La montagna! la montagna!" and have found to his bewilderment that his majestic neighbour had changed its dusky veil for a robe of fire. At dawn the view that daily met him was the lovely bay and its crowded shipping, bathed in vivid sunlight. The sight of Ischia in the distance may have called up dreams that were the first faint foreshadowing of Armida's Isle. In the streets, the rosy comeliness of the German matron, the elegant languor of the Spanish maiden, and the petulant grace of the Italian girl, all passed by him in turns, and taught him that the ideal does not consist in one perfect type but in multiplied forms of beauty. When little Torquato was nine years old his father's patron, the Prince of Salerno, was banished from Naples, and Bernardo Tasso and his family shared the fate of their master. This fact proves that the elder Tasso must have been not only a retainer but a strong partizan and personal friend of the Prince, and the way in which the duties of gratitude and fidelity

must have been early inculcated in the mind of Torquato may have had something to do with the tenacity with which, in after life, he clung to the house of Este. Still grasping the hand that had raised him, and supporting that hand in its hour of weakness, even as it had lifted him up in the hour of its strength, Bernardo Tasso followed his royal master into distant exile in the north of Italy; but his son, the young Torquato, was left at Rome to carry on his education. There he beheld the Church of Rome in her most imposing splendour, and his young enthusiastic spirit, grasping all that is most noble and poetical in her creed and ritual, and refusing to see what is gross and material or impure, built up for itself a temple of religious faith which, though it may seem to us too much darkened by the shadows of credulous superstition, was at least never lit for a moment with the dangerous fire of scepticism. After a few years spent in Rome, young Tasso proceeded to the Universities of Padua and Bologna, to complete his studies.

In these cities, which were at that time the chief seats of erudition and science in Europe, young Tasso mixed with the first men, both in learning and in wit, of Italy. He was here introduced into the very inmost shades of the classic grove, and he was also taught that which is far better than all the learning of the schools, to shape out his own opinions and mould his own character. His father destined him for the law, that mill in which the ethereal steed of genius has so often worked. But Tasso soon emancipated himself from this thralldom, and published his first efforts as a poet, which were favourably received by his friends of the Universities. It was during his residence at Bologna, that Tasso first became acquainted with the Cardinal Carlo D'Este, who took him with him to the court of Ferrara, that place which was to be the scene of so much triumph and so much anguish for the poet.

Alfonso, the Duke of Ferrara, was a remarkable man in his day. By his judicious and far-seeing policy, he had raised his small hereditary principality to a very high position among the kingdoms of Italy. He was possessed of no mean military skill, and the star of fame had shone for him upon more than one battle-field. He was an accomplished scholar, and took great pleasure in intercourse with men of intellect. But he was cold, proud, and unimpulsive, and though he invited men of letters to his court, and was a liberal patron to them, he regarded them as brilliant lamps that set off his own splendour rather than as anything else. Were one of these lamps thrown down, it would, of course, be quite beneath his princely dignity to stoop to raise it. Did one of these lamps approach nearer than he considered safe to the regal robes of himself or any of his illustrious house, it must of course at once be extinguished. Alfonso was unmarried, and the court was presided over by his sister, the Princess Leonora, whose name was to become so fatally entwined with that of our poet. A young man of such promise, as the penetrating eye of Alfonso soon perceived Tasso to be, was a

considerable prize to the Court of Ferrara; for in those days a poet was regarded to be as necessary in the train of the petty Italian sovereigns as was a jester in the castle of an English noble of the feudal ages. Tasso was petted and flattered in a way that would have turned the head of a far more experienced man; and intoxicated with these unexpected honours, he soon consented to become a pensioner of the Duke of Ferrara. This giving up of his independence was the first false step in Tasso's life. Had he kept his liberty, his story would probably have been a very different one.

When, however, we blame him for this act, we must remember how very slowly in those days a writer even of the highest power could gain for himself a public; and that an author, if he could not find a patron, might very reasonably expect to starve in a garret long before his laurels had taken root in the national mind. In some measure, we have to thank Alfonso for his patronage of Tasso, since it is likely that if at this period he had had to struggle for his livelihood as a poor author, his great poem would never have been brought to such polished perfection.

We now have to speak of the most difficult and diversely read passage in the life of Tasso. We mean his relations with the two Leonoras. We have no space to sift what others have said upon this subject; we can only give our own account of the matter. The Princess Leonora D'Este was a woman of great beauty and high intellectual gifts. But she had little heart, and she had no more idea of giving that little to a poor poet than she had of taking from her head her diamond coronet to throw it to a beggar who asked alms in the street. She had, however, a very womanly love of admiration, and when she found that the young poet, whose genius she fully appreciated, was ready to spend his time at her feet she had not the slightest objection to see him there; nay, she smiled upon him, and soon grew to take a sort of compassionate pleasure in protecting with her female tact those sensitive places which Tasso's nature possessed in greater numbers than even the natures of most literary men. She liked the homage with which he repaid her care; but to do her justice, she thought no more of his aspiring to her love than she thought of the lap-dog, who lay upon her silken robe and was fondled by her fair hand, wishing to learn to read. But Tasso, inexperienced as he was in courts, put a very different construction to what she meant upon her condescending caresses, and soon returned his royal mistress's supposed flame with usury.

Perhaps no man except Tasso, with his young, ardent imagination, would have mistaken the lady's meaning, and perhaps no woman except a princess, blinded with the pride of the house of Este, would have failed to discern the state of the poet's heart. As for the other Leonora, who was a lady-in-waiting on the Princess, she probably began her connection with Tasso under the figment of Platonic affec-

tion, which was just then popular in Italy, but which has been the rock where many a heart has split; and the heart of this poor Leonora was one of these. Notwithstanding the oft-told tale concerning the lady-in-waiting finding some lines dropped by Tasso, addressed to her mistress, and fondly supposing they were meant for herself, we decline to believe that Leonora's womanly penetration did not very soon observe the direction Tasso's love had taken. It is, however, quite consistent with the sort of female character that we conceive Leonora to have been, that she should, to keep Tasso near herself, have thrown out false hints concerning the Princess's favour for him, hoping to draw him ultimately to herself. In short, we believe both the Princess and the lady-in-waiting to have been two as arrant flirts as ever wore petticoats. Like all their sisterhood, they played recklessly with sharp-edged tools, and the results of the dangerous sport were two incurable wounds. And now let us catch one glimpse of Tasso in the brief day of his glory and happiness.

It is a summer afternoon in Ferrara. In a shady corner of the extensive gardens of the Este palace are gathered together a bright array of fair ladies and gallant gentlemen. In the midst of that brilliant assembly, and with every eye in it turned upon him, sits Tasso. The pale, handsome face is flushed, the eye flashes restlessly, the hand slightly trembles; that hand holds the manuscript of the "*Jerusalem Delivered*," and he is going to read it aloud. Leaning against a tree, with his proud severe face softened into something of benignity, stands the Duke Alfonso, and his brother, the more jovial-looking Cardinal, is near him. Close by sits the Princess, with attentive thought written in her eyes, and sympathetic sweetness in the smile upon her lips. On the grass reclines Leonora, casting up towards the poet's face glances, now playful now passionate. When he begins to read his voice wavers a little, but soon it rises and falls with his theme, and there is now fire, now pathos, always melody in its tones. He is reading the last deadly conflict between Tancred and Clorinda, and his impressive Italian audience send forth, in turns, cries of wonder, pity and horror. His face is telling the story as well as his voice; nay, it is almost the more expressive of the two. At length he comes to that line of which no translation can be more than a harsh imitation, but which, in the original, is full of such solemn, unutterable calm, following as it does the clash of arms, and the agony of the lover. "*Passa la bella donna e par che dorma.*" With the last word a hush falls for a moment upon the assembly, as though they were listening for the last breath of the dying lady. Then there is a convulsive sobbing of women, a frantic shouting of men; and Tancred and Clorinda have received their first passport for immortality. But dark days were at hand for both the poet and his work. On its publication the "*Jerusalem Delivered*" was violently assailed by the critics, who found in it too great a mixture of the ancient classic epic and the modern romance to suit their cut-

and-dried tastes, and Tasso, who had in him much of that sensitive diffidence that often accompanies genius, spent a good deal of time in trying to change it to please them. He even published an altered edition, called the "Jerusalem Conquered." But, fortunately for us, the "Jerusalem Delivered" has outlived, uninjured, the storm, and each successive wave of time has cast it higher up upon the mountain of fame. Soon after this, partly through the malice of a private enemy of the poet, and partly also, probably, through the indiscreet tongue of Leonora, the lady-in-waiting, Tasso's attachment for the Princess reached the Duke's ears, and the result of this was that Tasso was placed in confinement. With this captivity ended the bright calm part of the poet's life. What through his unlucky love, his master's unkindness, and the carping of the critics, his mind became disordered, and morbid melancholy and suspicion were his constant companions. After his release from prison his story is one long painful record of wandering from court to court, and from city to city, and of unrestful attempts to rest; of mistrust of true friends, and of weary longing for ideal love; of gloomy insanity and brilliant flashes of genius; of repentance for fancied sins and wild bursts of devotion. Now and then the Italian peasant would see at his door a ragged stranger, the delicate whiteness of whose hands, and the bruised condition of whose bare feet, proved him no accustomed vagrant. In his eyes there was a mixture of wildness and sadness, and his smile was a strange fitful gleam. Sometimes he would receive the charitable draught of milk offered him in silence; and sometimes he would sit down and make the dark-eyed contadine weep as he told a tale of distressed lovers or martyred saints. This was Tasso, flying, thus disguised, from real or supposed enemies. Once his yearning to see again his formerly so loved and revered master and his still adored Princess made him resolve to return to Ferrara; and, though the Princess, foreseeing his fate, and pitying her old favourite, warned him not to come, he carried out his design. Again he was imprisoned, and this time in a mad-house. It is impossible, in a short paper like the present, to follow Tasso minutely in all his wanderings; and, indeed, when we think of this man of rare and ethereal genius thus roughly used by an ungrateful generation, the tears fall too thickly upon our page for us to be able to go on with the sad itinerary. When Tasso was about fifty he at length found, in the Cardinal Aldobrandini, a true and appreciative friend. The Cardinal took him to his own palace, and resolved that he should be crowned with laurels in the Roman Capitol. But an incorruptible, instead of a corruptible, crown was preparing for the poet. Before the solemnity could take place in the Capitol, Tasso was taken ill, and died with the blessing of the head of his church hovering over his pillow. As we close his story we sigh and wish that he had lived in our days, and in our own land, that we might have loved and honoured him.

ALICE KING.

MR. NORTH'S DREAM.

BY THE AUTHOR OF "EAST LYNNE."

THE house stood in the midst of extensive grounds in one of the many suburbs of southern London, a green lawn dotted with shrubs lying before the front entrance. Land was plentiful there in the old days, and Mr. North had bought the place cheap. He was a man of some consideration in the city, of high commercial and private character, well regarded by his fellow-merchants.

The lawn lay steeped in the lovely twilight of a midsummer evening. The moon glittered on the leaves of the laurels; the night flowers, closing their petals, threw out their sweet scent, so that the air was rich with perfume. It was wafted to the open glass doors of a small sitting-room, where stood a young girl; and her heart, as she inhaled it, grew more rapturously joyful than it had been before, if such a thing were possible.

It was Millicent Carden, the niece of Mr. North's wife, and his ward. A merry, guileless, loving girl of seventeen, gay-natured, careless-mannered, sweet-tempered. Her face was fair and refined, with a bright bloom just now on the delicate features; her light brown hair, unconfined by comb and fashion, fell in a mass of silken curls. Mrs. North had gone out that night, taking her daughters, Frances and Amy. Mr. North, his son, and his nephew, Archie, were in the dining-room, for they had been delayed in the city, and came home very late. The glow on Millicent's face was but a reflection of the glow that illumined her heart; nay, her whole being. For she had learnt to love one with a strange fervour; and in such a nature as hers—deep, silent, ardent, love changes the whole current of life, and is as a very ray of heaven snatched from Eden.

The room door opened and some one came in. Millicent did not turn; she stood where she was and began to hum a tune carelessly; while all the while her pulses leaped up with a bound, and the cheeks' glow increased to a hot crimson.

"Why, Millicent! I thought you were going with the rest."

Ah, she could turn calmly now. The colour faded. The pulses became sober again. It was only John North.

"I did not much care to go, John: And your mother thought we should be so many."

"Then I hope my mother made an apology for leaving you. Frances or Amy might have stayed."

"Frances and Amy are ages older than I. Don't look so solemn, John : it was my own wish to stay ; I proposed it myself. Is my uncle not going ?"

"Yes. Later. He has some—matters to settle first with Archibald. I'll go out this way, I think. Good night to you, cousin mine."

John North had made the pause, as above put, in reference to the matters his father had to settle with Archibald. Miss Carden thought nothing of it ; if she had momentarily deemed anything odd in the words, it was the name Archibald—for she had never heard him called anything but Archie. She watched John North cross the lawn in his evening dress : he was a well-grown man of three-and-twenty, and had just been made a partner with his father. The young lady stepped out on the gravel and executed a dancing step in silent glee.

"You good old Johnny ! As if I should want to go when they did not invite *him* ! As if I would have gone unless they'd made me ! I fancied John suspected something last week, though," she pursued, more thoughtfully, bringing her dance to a conclusion ; "he looked so hard at us that evening when he came up and saw us in the laurel walk. Oh, how beautiful the night is ! how lovely every thing is in the whole world !"

Stooping down, she plucked one of the sweet June roses, and put it within the folds of her light summer dress, her hands and arms looking so fragile and faultless in the moonlight. Then she stepped back in-doors, and stood with her face against the pane, gazing out on the fair scene, touching now and again the blushing rose. Things were so still ! Not a sound broke the solitude ; and railways, with their shrieks and turmoil, had not quite cut up the place then. As the light in the west grew darker, and the moon brighter, the nightingales began their song in the neighbouring trees, the twinkling stars came out of their heavenly canopy, the light on the laurels turned to silver. Insensibly the girl herself broke softly into melody. Six months before, Archie North had given her "*Lalla Rookh* ;" she had soon learnt its seductive songs by heart.

"There's a bower of roses by Bendemere's stream,
And the nightingale sings round it all the day long ;
In the time of my childhood 'twas like a sweet dream
To sit in the roses, and hear the bird's song."

The striking of the clock interrupted her. Ten. Ten ! Why, what could they be about so long in the dining-room ? With a light step, she went along the gravel walks, and so round to the dining-room window.

It was closed. Closed that hot summer night : and her uncle, Mr. North, was so fond of air, having the windows open always, except in the dead of winter ! Millicent looked into the lighted room, and what she saw caused her heart to cease beating.

Archie North stood against the wall ; his arms folded, his head

bowed, his good-looking face inflamed with tears, his whole aspect one of humiliation—of intense shame. He was well grown as his cousin John, but younger—only twenty. Only twenty! And exposed at that age, without a home (save lodgings) to the snares and temptations of a London life! On the table lay some papers; they looked like bills; and Mr. North stood opposite Archie, talking, with his right hand outstretched, and an awful look of severity upon his face. Millicent turned sick with undefined fear, and crept back to the little room. What could the shame be?

The dining-room door opened and voices were heard in the hall. Millicent, trembling from head to foot, looked out of this room cautiously. Archie had taken up his hat and a light over-coat, that he wore to protect his clothes from the summer's dust.

"Never you attempt again to cross my threshold," Mr. North was saying, in the cold stern tone of an irrevocable decree. "You are a disgrace to the name of North, and I cast you off for ever from me and mine."

Archie went out without an answering word, and Mr. North shut the hall door upon him. Then he crossed the hall and went up the stairs, his boots creaking. Mr. North's boots always creaked; it had a pompous sound, like himself. He was a dark, upright, portly man, with a head well thrown back; eminently respectable, eminently self-important: doing his duties strictly, as respectable men like to do; a large subscriber to charities, a good husband and father; but, in the midst of it all, very hard.

Millicent went back to the open window, and saw Archie North crossing the lawn, the light coat swung on his arm. Was he going away for ever? With a heart sick to faintness, with a confusion of mind that seemed to put everything into a tumult, she ran after him, conscious of nothing but the moment's impulse.

"Archie. Archie."

Archie North turned short round. He was not her cousin, not in fact related to her. If he had begun to love her, however deeply and enduringly, he knew it must be all at an end now.

"What is the matter, Archie?"

"I thought you were out to-night, Millicent."

"No. The others went; I did not care to go. My uncle is angry with you: what is it?"

"Angry!" he repeated, as if the word were a perfect mockery to illustrate Mr. North's state of feeling towards him. "Yes; he is angry."

"But you have not deserved it."

"I have deserved it all; and worse."

With his hand upon her shoulder, he went back across the lawn to the room she had quitted. Standing just within the open window, he

looked down upon her while he spoke. ^{ry much}moonlight played upon his troubled face, hard now ^{as}his uncle's, and lighted up the blue eyes that seemed filled ^{with}nothing but a dogged obstinacy.

"I am going away, Millicent. London can no longer hold me, so a distant quarter of the globe must. I have been upon the wrong track this long while. God forgive me! I never meant it to come to this."

She tried to speak, but not a word came in answer. Her lips were white, her throat beating.

"On my soul, I had resolved to do better!—to set about redeeming the past. It was for your sake, Millicent; for your sake. And I should have carried it out, Heaven helping me. When I am far away, my darling; when they tell you wicked stories of me—and yet not wicked in one sense, for they are true—remember this: it was *you* who awoke me to better things. It has been just one faint glimmer of intervening light in a dark career: dark before; doubly dark after, for that's what it will be. God bless you, Millicent."

He clasped her to him with a pressure of iron and kissed her unresisting face, down which the tears were flowing. What Millicent said she did not fully know at the time, and never remembered afterwards; some confused words they were, of redeeming the past, of allowing her fortune to help him redeem it.

"No, no," he said, with a kind of harsh laugh. "I am a great blackguard, Millicent, but not quite so bad a one as that. Thank you ~~for~~ the thought," he added, holding her two hands in his, and looking down into her eyes as she stood before him. "Thank you, *my darling*, for all; thank you, above all, for your love. I do not suppose—bear with me one moment—that we shall ever meet again on this side the grave. If I can redeem things over yonder—but I'd better say nothing of that. My lot will probably be down, down, downwards: you will become the wife of some happy man, and the mother of his children. Fate deals out her prizes unequally. Fare you well; fare you well for ever."

With his coat on his arm as before, he went swinging across the lawn again, leaving Millicent fit to die of the moment's agony. And yet it all seemed so unreal! At the gate, lingering amid the clusters of shrubs that surrounded it, and looking out for him, was John North.

"I couldn't go, Archie, in the uncertainty," he said, coming forth into the moonlight. "How has it ended?"

"How should it end?" returned Archie. "There was only one way."

"You are discarded?"

"Of course I am discarded. Sent adrift. Your father is a harsh man in anything that touches his respectability, or his name's. Nine city magnates out of every ten might have done just the same."

"What shall you do?"

"What I can. He has not been all hardness. He said something about giving me a fresh start in life: paying my passage to Australia, and transmitting fifty pounds, to be touched on my landing there. I am to meet him to-morrow. I don't grumble, John; I've deserved all I've got, and more. I shall see you, old fellow, once again before I start."

A late omnibus passed. Archie North hailed it, and got upon the top. And John North went away quickly to the neighbouring house, that evening keeping festival.

Poor Millicent! She was dragging herself and her misery upstairs, when her uncle came suddenly out of his room in evening dress. She turned swiftly into a niche in the wall, and stood there until he had passed.

Archibald North set sail for Australia. There was no mystery made about him or his ill-doings, and Millicent heard what the rest heard. He had not been guilty of any crime; had not robbed his uncle's cash-box, or forged his name: but he had been an excessively prodigal sinner on his own score, and come to general grief; he had made an ocean full of disreputable debts, and altogether gone to the bad.

"And he had the opportunity of doing so well!" cried Mr. North, making severe comments in the bosom of his family. "I gave him a stool in my counting-house; I invited him here frequently; and this has been my reward! What he might have gone on to but for my providential discovery of his sins, I shudder to think. Henceforth let his name be unto us as though we had never known him."

And it was so.

* * * * *

Six years went by, and the seventh was quickly passing. Mr. North and his children prospered and prospered; the ill-doing nephew had never been heard of, and was quite forgotten. Mrs. North was dead; Amy had married; but with the exception of those two losses, the inmates of the old home were the same.

It was Christmas Eve, and bitter weather; ice and frost without, ruddy warmth and comfort within. The dessert-table was drawn to the fire in the dining-room, and Mr. North and his son sat at it. John was deep in the pages of a review he had brought home from town, but Mr. North was only reading the faces in the fire, and sipping his port wine at intervals. He saw that of his dead wife, whom he mourned sincerely, if soberly; he saw that of his absent daughter, who had a happy home of her own; he saw that of his younger son, also married and flourishing. Mr. North's own face was smooth, after the manner of a man who has a calm conscience, and a heavy balance-sheet—and he had both. His ledgers showed increase upon increase: and on the other side he had dispensed largely to Christmas charities, public and private. Had Mr. North's thoughts been laid bare, they would have been seen to

ignore altogether a sense of sin, and to run very much after the bent of a certain Pharisee: "I am thankful that I am not as other men are." Mr. North believed himself to be supremely good, and that's a fact: he fully thought he was going swimmingly on in the road that leads direct to heaven.

He saw other faces in the fire, besides those mentioned; his son's, John who was sitting beside him; and Millicent Carden's. He was wishing they would form a union with each other, those two; he had wished it for some time. Millicent was of age now. In accordance with her father's will, she did not attain her majority until she was twenty-four: and Mr. North had then formally resigned to her his trusteeship, informing her at the same time that she was worth twenty thousand pounds, well invested. Had he been John, he should have proposed to her years ago; times and again he had felt inclined to say a prompting word; but he knew how much better these things work when left alone. Millicent had been ill in the summer with fever—and she did not seem to have recovered entire strength.

"You will be thirty in a few months, John," suddenly observed Mr. North, breaking the silence.

John looked up from his review. "Yes; getting quite a middle-aged man."

"Not that yet. It will come, though, for years creep on us imperceptibly. Why don't you marry?"

Mr. John North cut two pages of his book before replying. "I don't know that anybody would have me."

"What nonsense, John! In your case it would be only to ask and have. But if you *don't* ask, why of course ——"

Mr. North did not finish the sentence. John laughed, but did not attempt to prolong the subject. His father looked at him.

"Yes, sir, though you may laugh, many would answer, 'Yes,' to the asking of John North. But there's one, above all the rest, whom I should wish you to choose."

"Why, who's that?" returned John, in some surprise.

"You need not go far to find her. Millicent Carden."

John North returned to his review again with a slight smile. And it vexed his father.

"Have you no better answer than that to give me?"

"I should not care to marry Millicent. She is my cousin, you know."

"And what though she is your cousin?" indignantly spoke Mr. North. "She has twenty thousand pounds."

John cut his review.

"And she is one of the best and nicest girls that the whole world contains. Don't be a fool, John."

"She is a sweet girl; a charming girl," came the ready assent. "But I have not thought of her as a wife."

"Think now, then."

The silence and the impassive look on his son's face did not seem to promise well for the proposition. Was Mr. North going to be thwarted in his hope?—the doubt showed him how surely he had been indulging it.

"Make your mind up to marry, and take Millicent," urged Mr. North, impressively. "My blessing shall be upon it. John, I have hoped for this union a long while: cherished it, I believe."

John North grew serious then. He closed the book, leaving the paper-knife between its pages.

"I am sorry for that, sir; very sorry to disappoint you, if you have indeed cherished it. I had no idea you were doing anything of the sort. Putting myself entirely out of the question, I am sure Millicent would not have me. She would not have any one."

"She is well again."

"Her health I was not thinking of, but her inclination. I have never exchanged a word with her upon the subject, but I am fully convinced her intention, is not to marry. Millicent had her little romance years ago: and wore it out."

"Why, what do you mean?" cried Mr. North. "Would you insinuate that Millicent was ever in love?"

"Yes; unhappily. With Archie North."

Mr. North stared at his son, as if he were unable at once to take in the words. There was scorn in his eye, contempt in his tone when he answered.

"In love with Archie North! Why, she was a child when he went away."

"Oh no, she was not: a girl of seventeen is as capable of love as a woman of thirty, perhaps more so. Father, I know I am right. And Archie was in love with her."

"Archie, the reprobate!" apostrophised the elder man: and the utter condemnation of the tone, the hatred it expressed, served to prove that the offending nephew had never been forgiven, no not by an iota. "At any rate, if it be as you say, though I doubt it, she has had time to forget her fancy. I would rather say her folly."

"Quite time. But I do not think she has done it."

"And you would make this an objection to the asking her to be your wife?—a child's passing fancy! I should have given you credit for more sense."

"Pardon me, sir, I did not say it. My own wishes, for or against, need not be brought into the discussion at all. What I said was, that Millicent would not have me, though I did ask her: and I am sure she would not."

John North opened the book again as he spoke, and went on cutting its leaves. For some little time he had been indulging a day-dream of

his own, but it was not connected with Millicent. Mr. North tossed off the glass of port at his elbow, and said no more. He had never thought his clever business son so near a fool; and he intended to prove him one.

In the pretty garden room, where you once saw Millicent Carden, you may see her still. They often sat there. The window was closed now, the warm green curtain fell across its shutters in ample folds; the fire burnt clear and bright; the tea waited on the table, and Millicent sat ready to make it. Miss North had gone to a neighbour's, to help dispense to little children the prizes from a Christmas tree, which she had been for some days assisting to adorn.

She sat at the table, waiting for her uncle and cousin to come in. But ah, how altered! Scarcely a trace remained of the winsome, gleeful girl of seventeen, to whom her boy-lover had bidden so abrupt and miserable an adieu six years and a half before. She wore a soft dress of light grey cashmere, and a close white net-cap, very pretty, but simple, nearly, as a quakeress'. No ornament, save a gold chain, and some fine lace at her wrists. After the summer's fever, her hair grew so thin that they cut it off close, and she had to wear caps: it was growing on now, but she wore the caps still. The features were delicate as of yore: the deep hazel eyes more thoughtful. She looked like one who has passed through tribulation.

For the first time the thought struck Mr. North as he came in to tea. Proving how slow we are, for the most part, to take up indications of the familiar every-day life by which we are surrounded. In the subdued meek manner, the quiet face, the unobtrusive attire, so void of fashion and frivolity, Mr. North saw cause to think his son was right. His unobservant eyes, closed hitherto, were rudely opened.

"But she has had time, and to spare, to forget the folly," he thought. "Even its remembrance must have long ago passed away. John would get her for the asking."

John sat by her now, just as usual. But as Mr. North noted their manners to each other, so entirely that of brother and sister, a slight doubt arose to Mr. North, or rather would have arisen, but that he drove it back again.

"You look tired, Millicent."

"Do I, uncle? I am not tired; although Frances and I have had a busy day, giving away the things. The poor people are all so grateful to you, uncle dear."

Mr. North received the gratitude as his due. He deemed himself quite an earthly angel, in the matter of charity. "All right," he said in answer, "I hope none have been forgotten."

"If Millicent's tired, it must be at our keeping her waiting tea so long," cried John. "It's half-past nine o'clock."

"Time you went for Frances, John," she said.

"I am going. Those little mites were to be put to bed at nine, and she said she did not care to stay after that. She *is* fond of children, is Frances."

He rose to go out as he spoke; but opened the door again, and said a word to Millicent; who nodded an answer, "I shall be ready, John." Mr. North, buried in his own reflections, did not observe it. He was making up his mind to speak to Millicent, and get that absurd question set at rest that John had started. He could not believe it yet: the longer he thought of it the more ridiculous it seemed. And yet he hesitated, lest he might do harm—harm to John's remote chance of succeeding. The tea-things were sent away, and Millicent got out her work, some slippers she was working for John and Mr. North sat on in indecision.

"Another Christmas Eve, Millicent!" he said, when he at length turned round to her. "The years steal upon us, my dear."

"They do that, uncle."

"I have been thinking to-night—one does get thoughtful at Christmas-tide—that it is time you were married."

Millicent looked at him, some wonder in her eyes; and a smile stole over her sweet face.

"You should say that to Frances, uncle. It is her turn first; she is ever so much older than I am."

"Oh, Frances," he slightly said. "My opinion is she does not think of marriage. She lets her chances slip."

"Neither do I think of it, uncle."

"Nonsense," he testily responded; "I shall insist upon your marrying. I mean I wish you to do it."

"No living person has the right to insist on my course of action; not even you, uncle: I am my own mistress. Forgive me for saying it."

Mr. North's face darkened. "A fable was whispered to me—as a fable I regarded it—that some—some—what shall I call it?—some love nonsense had lain between you and that miserable nephew of mine, who was a disgrace to his name."

A change passed over her face. The eyelids quivered, the mouth grew sad and pale. Mr. North watched the signs.

"Millicent! was it so? Answer me, child. Surely you can? It must be as a thing dead and buried now."

"Yes, I cared for him. And he for me."

"But you do not care still? You cannot."

"Perhaps not. I suppose not. I think he must be dead," she continued, a kind of weariness in her tone. "He would have been back ere now if he had lived."

"Back!" cried the scandalized man, "back? He'd know better than to venture back here. Why!" looking condemningly at her, "*you* would not have countenanced him had he come?"

"Yes, I should. Stay a moment, uncle; don't be angry with me."

But for believing him to be dead, I could not say this to you. I could not speak of him ; I have thought he must be dead—oh, for these three years past. But had he come back with his—his wrong-doings—redeemed, hoping, striving, purposing to do well for the future, why, I would have welcomed him, and helped him in it. Let it pass : why should the discussion arise?"

"And it is for this man's sake—dead, though you admit he probably is—that you deliberately say you will never marry? Shame upon you, Millicent ! I am thankful your poor aunt is not alive to hear it."

"I did not say I should never marry," she meekly returned, and her tone was full of pain and contrition, as if accepting as her due the shame he cast on her. "I would not marry now; no one living could tempt me to ; but I cannot answer for what I may do in the future—in remote years to come. The probabilities are that I never shall ; still I cannot answer for it. We all change so, uncle, as you must know."

It seemed so complete a check to any hopes for his son, that Mr. North was angered beyond repression. He set on and called Archie sundry hard names, recapitulating over his committed sins and offences in a far more comprehensive manner than Millicent had heard in the days of the trouble. She listened without comment, folding up the slipper and putting it away, until his wrath had expended itself and his tongue was fain to cease. She spoke then.

"Yes, uncle, I dare say it was all very true, miserably true ; but you know he might not have continued so. There is such a thing as young men awaking to the errors of their course and entering on a better."

Mr. North would have answered that there was no chance of the young man under discussion awaking to the error of his, but that his niece had left the room. She came back with her things on : at which he looked surprised. She and Frances had wished to go to a Christmas-eve service at a church hard by, and John had promised to take them. Even while she was explaining this, they came for her.

Mr. North remained alone. Matters through life had gone so smoothly with him that he could not bear to be crossed. It tried both himself and his temper. He knocked the fire about, he paced the room, he walked into the hall in his restlessness. A good, domesticated girl like Millicent, and twenty thousand pounds, slipping through his favourite son's fingers ! Mr. North dashed open the front door, seeking for a breath of the cold fresh air on his hot and angry brow.

It was colder than he thought for ; flakes of snow had begun to fall, and there was some ice on the door-step ; for Mr. North's feet slipped upon it, and he would have measured his length on the ground but for the extended arm of some visitor, who had approached the door. Mr. North threw his own arm around the pillar, while he took breath and recovered his equanimity.

"Merciful powers ! I was all but down !"

"It *is* my uncle !" cried an answering voice. "I was not quite sure of it, sir, until you spoke. May I come in ?"

To say that Mr. North recoiled in some terror ; to say that he gazed at the speaker in alarm, would not be to say much. Was it his nephew, Archie, standing there, or was it not ? With the past conversation turning on Archie North, with his mind full of him, Mr. North for one single moment fancied he was being deceived by some spectral vision, and backed into the hall.

Archie followed him and shut the door. It was not the Archie of former days, strong, active, buoyant, but a kind of broken-down man, who was lame, and walked by the help of a stick. Mr. North, seeming almost as if he really fled from a phantom, backed yet again into the parlour he had quitted ; Archie and his stick went after him.

There ensued a scene. A scene little fitted for the blessed Christmas-tide about to dawn. When Mr. North had once taken in the fact that it was his nephew in real flesh and blood, and not a deception of fancy, his passion burst out. Archie had come at an unlucky time ; but for his uncle's mind having first been freshly embittered against him, he might have met with a less harsh reception.

The traveller strove to explain his appearance and a little of the past. For six years he had been working manfully in Australia ; all his bad habits, his careless ways eradicated ; he had earned his living, but not enough to put by anything of consequence—great luck did not attend him. A changed man, yearning for his home and friends, he had determined to return to the old country, where he could equally earn a competence ; and he set sail. The ship, when she had arrived very near her destination, was wrecked on the coast of the Isle of Wight ; and Archie had received an injury on the rocks, from which he was but slowly recovering. It had detained him, and exhausted his available funds. He had written an account of this to Mr. North, which letter he supposed had been delivered that morning, and stated he was following close upon it.

All this he essayed to explain. Mr. North did not catch a word of it. He put up his hands and stormed at him, and for the first time for many years *swore* ; he drove him forth, calling him very hard names in the process ; he told him he did not know him henceforth, and never had known him since that wicked time seven years ago. Finally he closed and barred the hall door upon him ; and the unhappy wanderer limped away across the lawn.

Mr. North sat down over the fire to recover himself. He believed he had done a righteous thing in discarding the once bad man ; and his own passion he excused to himself. One cannot be always watchful, says the plastic conscience. Snatches of Archie's explanation stole into his mind now imperfectly, though he had not seemed to hear any

of it at the time ; amidst them a confused reminiscence of his having said he had but eighteenpence in the world.

"And that's more than he deserves," quoth Mr. North, savagely. "How dared he come back with his disgrace? How dared he show himself at my ——"

A tremendous ring at the hall-bell cut short the speech. Mr. North started up with an evil cry of rage ; he thought the fellow had come back again, and hastened across the hall to drive him away, calling out to his servants not to come, that he'd answer the door himself. And he unbarred it.

But he was wrong. The 'postman stood there, and put a letter into his hand.

"You are late," growled Mr. North.

"Yes, sir, the delivery is heavy to-night, and the roads are 'so slippery, one has to walk with caution."

The letter was from Archie ; the one he had supposed would have been already received. Mr. North flung it on the table, in a cliaaax of passion, and let it lie there.

The joyous peal of the church bells broke upon his ear, ringing in Christmas. It was a sweet melody : and Mr. North remembered how his wife in her last Christmas, when she was sitting in that very chair close at his elbow, had remarked that she could fancy they spoke the words, "Peace on earth ; good will toward men." There was not much of peace, or good will either, in Mr. North's heart this evening.

He heard his children entering ; and taking up the letter, thrust it into his pocket out of sight, unopened. The only wonder was, that he did not put it effectively away from sight, on the fire. Spiced wine, cake, and other good things were brought in ; and they sat round the red coals, talking pleasantly, quite unconscious that Mr. North's plumage had been ruffled. Millicent sat by her uncle ; she put her hand on his arm, that lay on the elbow of his chair, as if she would intimate that the little rupture between them was over and forgotten.

"I wish you had gone with us, uncle ; I think you would have liked it. The singing was so good, and the sermon beautiful. It only lasted ten minutes, but it was full of love and peace. He asked us how we could expect God's love to reach us if we did not love our fellow creatures ; he said this was the season for the putting away of evil passions and hatred, and for receiving the loving spirit of Christ into our hearts, who had done so much for us."

"What sort of a night is it?" responded Mr. North, his tone testy and impatient—as if there were something in Millicent's words that grated on his temper.

"Snowing," answered John. "We shall have a white Christmas."

Mr. North went to rest after the others, and by that time, what with the fire and the good things he had taken, was in a tolerably genial

humour. But he could not get to sleep. Down deep in his conscience something sharp was stinging and pricking, and making itself inconveniently felt. Tossing and turning from side to side, it was four o'clock in the morning before he got to sleep.

And he woke up at six. He awoke with a great horror within, and perspiration without. He sat up in bed and stared out into the darkness; and only discovered by degrees that what he had been dreaming was a dream, and not reality.

It was a dream that shook him to the core; a vivid scene so like life; and the terror, the dismay, the remorse that overwhelmed him were so indisputably felt—felt still in all their agony, now that he was wide awake—that Mr. North for the moment verily thought it must have been a vision sent to him, like unto the visions of old in the days of the patriarchs.

He had dreamt over again the scene of the past night, or very much of it—of the return of Archibald North and his thrusting him out. He further dreamt that he had gone forth to pursue him with his anger, and went stamping up hill and down dale unable to find him. Suddenly he found himself in a road-side field, about half a mile from his own home, and there, by the pond, he saw Archie lying dead, his upturned face calm and serene, pale but pleasant to look upon, as if its owner had passed to a blissful rest. All in a moment, the most intense remorse took possession of Mr. North as he gazed: he thought that he himself was also dead, and was about to answer for his sins. One that looked like an angel, clad in radiant white, stood there with a severe and pitying countenance; severe in its condemnatory anger, pity for the man who had forfeited peace for ever. "Pardon, Lord, pardon!" he had cried out in his desperate anguish, knowing all the time that pardon was impossible; and a soft, sweet, mournful wail had sounded in his ear the refusing answer: "Inasmuch as ye did it not to one of the least of these, ye did it not to me."

Mr. North awoke. Horror lay on his heart; sweat, as of, the death agony, on his brow. It was some time before he could believe he was yet in this state of existence; it was much longer before he could in the least overcome the agitation that shook his soul.

In all reactions, such as this, the feelings necessarily run into exaggeration. The harshness of the previous night appeared to Mr. North in the worst light possible; a heinous crime; a sin that perhaps even yet, although the world was his still, he might never find forgiveness for. It stared him in the face in all the vivid colouring that newly-awakened remorse wears. Ay, and not only this last act, but the whole course of his doings by Archibald in the years gone by, came rolling before him as waves in a sea of fire.

"His own brother's son! his own brother's son!" were the words that kept beating their burthen on his brain. His brother whom he had

loved very dearly when they were boys together; and who, when dying, had asked him to take care of his boy Archie. How had Mr. North responded to the dying prayer? It is true he had given Archie a stool in his counting-house, and told him he'd get on if he took care, but he had not held out a hand to save him from sin. He had left him to get lodgings where he could, abandoning him (he saw it now) to the perils of a London life. And when Archie went wrong (and it was nearly a matter of course that he would go wrong) and his tribulations were laid bare, he had hurled him forth upon the world, unforgiven. Those tribulations of poor Archie's were as nothing, to the dire tribulations that rent himself now. And the refrain kept on and on, repeating itself for ever—His own brother's son! his brother's son!

So certainly did Mr. North appear to have seen the dead body lying by the pond, every little particular being as clear as a witnessed scene, that but for the sense of shame that lay in attending to a dream, he would have got up and gone to look at the spot. As it was, he lay till daylight. Drawing his blind aside, he saw that the ground was covered with snow; but not a deep snow; and the sky looked tolerably clear now. Perhaps a more miserable man than Mr. North when he dressed himself was not to be found that day in London. God had shown the self-righteous Pharisee his sin.

The children (he was apt to call them children still, as we all do, however old they may get) came up to kiss him as he entered the breakfast-room, Frances first. "Dear papa; I wish you a happy Christmas, and a great many many of them!" And so they all followed: and Mr. North nearly groaned by way of answer.

What a room of luxury it was! a bright and blazing fire, a plenteous breakfast. Tea and coffee in their silver pots, savoury meats warm and cold, the *paté de foie gras*, sent to his orders direct from Strasbourg, forming the centre dish. All this for him, the hard, selfish man, and for his children; but where was his brother's son?

He could not eat. John asked him if he had a head-ache, and he answered yes; and when the breakfast was over, turned his chair to the fire. Where *was* he? With only eighteen pence in his pocket, how could he find shelter and food? That the calamity he dreamt of had not happened, Mr. North felt sure of now, since no news had come, for the pond was within view of the road, and any one lying near it could not fail to be seen.

When left alone, he drew the letter from his pocket, and opened it. It contained an account of Archie's life in Australia; of his shipwreck and injury on the coast of the Isle of Wight; just what he had wished to tell the previous night. "Do not, my dear uncle, think I am coming back to be a burthen on you, or to disgrace you," it concluded. "Disgrace and folly, thank heaven, I left behind in England, when that severe lesson was read to me, just six years and six months ago. I have

a little money (it is a good thing I did not bring it with me in the ship) lodged in the hands of some Australian merchants, who have a branch house in London, and I shall soon be earning more. They have offered me a lucrative post in their London house, which I think I shall accept. I know how justly angry you were with me when I went away; but I hope you will forgive and receive me, the prodigal son, and let me spend a happy Christmas day with you all in the dear old home. I am not quite up to travelling yet, but I must come; I have set my heart upon it. Do you remember the cake that Amy used to make to be cut after dinner on Christmas-day, with a gold and an iron ring in it? Do you remember the hopes and fears as to who should get the rings?—and the laughing and the fun? I hope the cake is an institution still. I would not miss it this year for the world, and so I shall come—and send on this letter to prepare my way for me. Dear uncle! the random boy has become a steady man; the scapegrace has put away his sins for wisdom; the careless ne'er-do-well has changed to one of earnest purpose. You will not refuse to welcome him!"

Mr. North held the letter in his hand, and gazed at its writing (that such a thing should have to be told of him!) until his tears dropped fast upon it. It was so different from what he had expected; it was no begging letter, this. And he had turned him out with harsh words. Where was he?—where was he? Mr. North put on his hat and went down the road, as if to take a little walk before service. No; the pond lay there still enough, but Archibald was not lying by it.

They went to church; and Mr. North did his best to hide from others that he could not attend to the prayers. Peace on earth and good will to all men! What had he to do with it now? Oh, he seemed very very far from Him whom the angels heralded in with those glorious words. It was as if a great gulf had sprung up between him and heaven. He did not dare to stay the Sacrament, and he wondered how worthy in God's sight he must have been in the past Christmas days to partake of it. Not a single cry for forgiveness went up from his closed lips; his sense of sin lay too heavily upon him.

They dined at four; it had been the Christmas hour when the children were young, and it was never altered. There was no cake now; somehow sobriety in the later years had fallen upon them, and Amy, who was the cake-maker, had gone. She and her husband were to have dined there this day, but were prevented. The only guests were two young ladies, orphans, one of whom (she was but a governess) made John North's day dream. And he meant to tell her so, though he foresaw it would bring disappointment to his father.

It was a well-spread board: the turkey a prize; the plum-pudding rich and radiant; the wine good: but Mr. North could scarcely swallow a morsel; every bit seemed fit to choke him, every drop to chill him. Sitting by himself in the little garden room before dinner, he had lived

over the interview of the previous night ; he had lived over (oh, worse than all) the dream. A nasty superstition was beginning to creep upon him, he who had never been given to superstition in all his life : that the dream must have come to him as a foreshadowing of the truth, and that Archibald was really dead.

Perhaps he was *in* the pond, instead of beside it ? The cold sweat broke over Mr. North at the sudden thought, just as it had when awaking from the dream. An awful dread, that it was so, took possession of him ; a conviction so sure that he looked upon it as a prevision. No wonder he could not eat any dinner.

But, if it had not been for his own pre-occupation, he must have seen that some unusual emotion was stirring Millicent. She wore her little net cap, but the cheeks it shaded were crimson, the eyes had a sweet light of expectation ; her blue silk dress was nearly as gay as the dresses of yore. Little did Mr. North suspect that Millicent had read the letter. In his troubled state he had contrived to drop it in the morning, before going to the pond ; Frances had picked it up, read it, thinking it no breach of faith, and shown it to Millicent. But they kept their own counsel, and concluded that the evident perturbation of Mr. North must be connected with this.

He could not sit there. His brother's son ; his own brother's son ! Making some inaudible excuse of a headache, of not wanting dessert, he left the table at the close of dinner, and stole out of the house by a side door, very much as though he were going to a funeral. That Archibald was in the pond seemed to have grown into a certainty—perhaps had thrown himself in, broken-hearted, after that cruel reception—and Mr. North could not keep from it. It drew him to it with a kind of fascination, just as surely and helplessly as he felt that he was drifting further and further away from heaven.

The snow was falling again ; the air keen ; and Mr. North had to walk slowly and carefully along the road because of the ice, until he turned on to the field. Crunching the snow beneath his feet, he paced round and round the pond and strained his eyes into it ; and saw nothing. But for the utter despair that lay upon him, the lively sense of guilt in the sight of God, a petitioning cry had gone up to heaven that there might be no one lying beneath its waters. With the morrow he would confess to Archibald's visit and have the pond dragged. How bear the suspense until then ? How bear it ?

He took the field way home ; the snow was less dangerous than the ice ; and by-and-bye dragged his weary limbs through a gate in the remote part of his own grounds, into which the fields opened. Scarcely had he done this when a groan broke upon his ear. A groan, and then another ; and then something like a faint voice, speaking faint words.

"Halloa ! what's that ?" called out Mr. North.

"Uncle ! Is it you ?"

With a rush as of burning heat coursing on through all his veins, Mr. North turned to the spot, and saw Archie lying in a kind of dry ditch, or dyke. He was not dead: but he would surely have died, left there another night. The explanation was simple. On his way to an inn up the road, where he thought he might sleep, when driven forth the previous night, he had taken the more sheltered and well-remembered path through the grounds, in preference to the slippery highway. Awkward from his lameness, deceived by the snow, he had wandered from the path, missed his footing at the edge of the dyke, and fallen into it. Upon essaying to rise he found he could not, he believed his leg was broken. Too far off to attract attention, though he had called at intervals until strength and voice were alike exhausted, there he had lain ever since.

Mr. North was not of a demonstrative nature; but there may arise moments in all men's lives where emotion has its way more or less. He could not get to Archie in the dyke, without stooping down in the most inconvenient fashion, but he held one uplifted hand between his, stroking it tenderly as a fond mother may stroke her little child's.

"If you can find one or two men, uncle, just to carry me to the inn and to get a surgeon?"

To the inn! Mr. North bounded along the path to his home at a faster rate than he had tried since his days of youth and slenderness. The tears were raining from his eyes at the wondrous mercy vouchsafed to him; and in the glad thankfulness that his sin was not irredeemable, his mouth, like unto Daniel's of old, could once more open: "God be merciful to me, a sinner!"

They carried Archie in. The surgeon was there and did what was requisite, and said he would want good nursing. Mr. North gently answered that he would be tended as his own son. Millicent was admitted then. Their hands met together, their eyes looked straight into each other's, and they knew that the boy and girl love had lasted in all its brightness; that sadness and separation were now over.

"To think that he should have lain there for eighteen hours with nothing to eat!" lamented Miss North, who was of a practical turn.

"But I didn't, Frances," spoke up Archie. "I had by chance a hard biscuit in my pocket, and eat it this morning."

"After all, it has been a *blessed* Christmas Day," murmured Mr. North to himself that night in his bed-chamber, as he put up his hands reverently. "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men!"

